

## Syllabus

### History Textbook Workshop

**When & Where:** Spring Semester 2026 (mid-February to the end of May, 2026)      Time: Wed. 16:00-18:00      Place: Online at the platform of Off University

**Hosted by:** Zurich University, the University of New Europe, and Off University with **3 ECTS** Zurich Certification\*

**Department:** **History Department of the University of Zurich**

**Convenor:** **Anna Adashinskaya**

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**Webpage:** [https://offuniversity.org/call-for-participation-htw/#Anna\\_Adashinskaya](https://offuniversity.org/call-for-participation-htw/#Anna_Adashinskaya)

#### \*How to count your Off university course towards credit?

Upon successful completion of the course, participants will receive a certificate for 3 ECTS credits, jointly issued by the History Department at Zurich University, the University of New Europe, and Off University. This means that you are able to use these credits at any university in the EHEA in a programme you are enrolled in, or you may count this as previous knowledge in a future study programme. In order to be sure that you can transfer the credits, we suggest you get written confirmation by your home university's students' office. And if you are not enrolled in any university programme: You are very welcome to join! All our courses are free of charge and open to anyone: students, scholars, activists.

#### Description

Are you passionate about history and interested in exploring how historical knowledge is written, interpreted, and used? The History Textbook Workshop is an innovative **online course** designed for participants aged 14 to 25, which investigates the ways in which history textbooks reflect political, cultural, and ideological frameworks across different countries and contexts. Through interactive and collaborative sessions, students critically examine the real examples of History Textbooks from different countries and periods of contemporary history and analyze how they shape historical narratives, influence identities, and convey political messages, while developing key skills in source criticism and comparative analysis. This course challenges the notion of textbooks as neutral sources giving access to the knowledge of the past. By comparing how the same historical events are presented in textbooks from conflicting and competing national traditions, students will discover how omissions, emphases, and interpretative frameworks reveal the political contexts in which

these materials were produced. This comparative approach helps students understand not just whose history is taught, but why certain stories are told and others are silenced.

### Participants:

The course brings together a small international cohort of 12 student participants. The course convenor is **Dr. Anna Adashinskaya**, a historian of Byzantium and the Slavic Balkans with expertise in how memory, power, and historical narratives intersect. She is supported by the team of Off University (**Dr. Julia Strutz**, **Dr. Dorine Schellens**, and **Dr. Dina Gusejnova**), who bring extensive experience in innovative research, engaging pedagogical approaches and academic solidarity work. Across **14 weekly** online sessions, students will engage with **8 experts** in history and the humanities from around the world, who will present textbooks within the areas of their expertise, offering diverse national and methodological perspectives.

### Course Format:

The course takes place **fully online** on a secure platform managed by Off University, with sessions scheduled weekly on **Wednesday from 4:00 to 6:00 PM CET** (90 minutes each) across **14 weeks from mid-February to the end of May 2026**. This format ensures accessibility for participants from different time zones and educational contexts, while creating a supportive and safe environment for debates and discussions.

### Digital Self Defense:

Our platform is dedicated to spread knowledge threatened by authoritarian and right-wing populist regimes and to put measures in place that enable people to practice digital self-defense. We encourage all users to sign up for the platform anonymously and respect others' preferences for staying anonymous. **Please do not force anyone to share personal information or take screenshots of others without their knowledge.**

The courses take place on Off University's Moodle. The platform includes an encrypted video-call option, a cloud storage, as well as a messaging system. We would like to remind all users that communication with other users outside of the platform (i.e. e-mail, Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp or other video conferencing tools) may put them at risk.

To find more about digital security and ways for digital care, visit our website:

<https://offuniversity.org/faq/>

### Aimed Outcomes

#### A general understanding of:

- History textbooks as constructed narratives and the political, cultural, and ideological biases that shape them
- Such phenomena as 'collective memory', 'national identities', 'memory wars' and 'usable past'
- The mechanisms through which nationalist, imperial, and ethnocentric perspectives are embedded in educational narratives
- The implications of the transition from communist to post-communist historical narratives
- The production and authorization of historical knowledge within public sphere institutions
- Teleological historical discourses and alternative approaches to teaching contested histories as shared past.

**The skills to be gained upon active participation:**

- To apply source criticism techniques to educational materials
- To use comparative methodologies for discourse analysis across different national and ideological contexts
- To identify and deconstruct teleological narratives and anachronistic projections in historical writing
- To analyze how language, terminology, and framing choices shape historical meaning
- To engage actively with diverse perspectives and others' viewpoints
- To collaborate with peers to produce critical analyses of history textbooks
- To contribute to public discourse about the political uses of the past
- To present and articulate complex arguments about sensitive historical topics in an international, multicultural learning environment

**Course components****Weekly Sessions:**

Every session begins with an Introduction by the convenor theoretically framing the week's topic. The core of each session features a presentation by an invited expert or the convenor, who introduces a specific history textbook or set of textbooks from their area of expertise. Participants are encouraged to engage with the material in real-time, asking questions and raising observations as the presentation unfolds.

Further, sessions transition into facilitated discussions that create space for students to share their thoughts about the mandatory readings, their own experiences, compare different national perspectives, and collectively analyze the implications of what they've learned. Sessions are concluded with individual or small-group assignments. These may include close reading of specific textbook passages, comparative tasks examining how different textbooks treat the same event or a reflexive writing assignment on the discussed topic. These assignments are completed during the session itself, with time allocated for participants to work independently or collaboratively before sharing their opinions.

**Weekly Readings:**

For each session, participants will receive a selection of short readings in English that cover theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, or contextual background for the week's topic. These readings are divided into Mandatory and Optional.

Mandatory readings are essential for each class and participants **ARE EXPECTED** to complete these readings **BEFORE** each session. These texts form the basis for the in-class discussions and critical engagement with the textbook materials.

Optional readings are provided for participants who wish to pursue particular topics in greater depth, beyond the core curriculum. Participants **ARE NOT EXPECTED** to complete these readings before the classes. Optional readings may include full-length articles, book chapters, or advanced theoretical texts connected to the week's topics.

All readings (mandatory, optional and textbook chapters, discussed by the experts) will be compiled into a comprehensive course reader and made available on the Off University website: <https://moodle.offuniversity.org/course/section.php?id=247>

**Course Assignments:**

The History Textbook Workshop includes **two alternative assignments**, from which participants will **choose one**, allowing them to apply critical analysis skills in either a creative or a collaborative format.

Final Assignment 1: Writing History in the Making (End of Semester, after Week 12, due by Week 13). In this **Final Assignment**, participants will write about a contemporary event as if composing a chapter for a future history textbook (c. 1000-1500 words). This creative exercise asks students to imagine themselves as textbook authors writing 20-30 years in the future, looking back on a significant event happening in our present moment.

Each participant will select a contemporary event in consultation with the convenor (either through individual appointed consultations or via emails). The event might be political, social, cultural, technological or environmental, i.e. anything that participants believe will be remembered by future generations. The goal is to choose an event that is substantial enough to merit the inclusion in a textbook yet manageable enough to be addressed within the scope of 1000-1500 words.

**Possible examples:**

- #MeToo movement
- the legalization of same-sex marriage in the EU
- the work-from-home and Zoom rise
- TikTok ban debates in various countries
- the 'manosphere' and men's rights activism online
- Universal Basic Income pilot programs
- decolonization movements in museums and universities
- the hijab ban in France
- Poland's ban on abortion
- euthanasia legalization
- fast fashion backlash

This assignment challenges participants to make conscious decisions about narrative framing, selection of details, tone, and emphasis, i.e. all the choices that real textbook authors face.

Students must consider:

- What information should be included or omitted?
- How would the event be contextualized?
- What causes and consequences would be highlighted?
- What implicit messages about values, political position, or historical meaning would the narrative convey?

**OR**

Assignment 2: Collaborative Textbook Annotation (End of Semester, after Week 12, due by Week 13)

This **Final Assignment** is a collaborative annotation project conducted on *PubPub*, an open-access publishing platform. During the Week 1, participants will collectively select a real history textbook chapter that will serve as the focus for detailed critical analysis. Throughout the semester, participants will work together to create a comprehensive annotated edition of this chapter.

The textbook chapter will be uploaded as a PDF, and participants will use *PubPub*'s annotation tools to add comments, analysis, and critical observations directly to the document. Each annotation will highlight specific passages, analyze their significance, identify narrative strategies, note omissions or emphases, provide alternative perspectives, and connect the textbook's approach to broader themes of the course.

The collaborative nature of this project is essential. Participants will build upon each other's comments, creating a layered critique that reflects the diverse perspectives within the

international cohort. This annotated textbook chapter will constitute the course's collective online publication – a piece of open educational material that will be publicly available for other students, educators, and interested readers.

## Assessment and Grading

The History Textbook Workshop prioritizes collaborative learning and intellectual growth over traditional grading. By default, the course operates on a pass/fail basis. Upon successful completion of all course requirements, participants will receive a certificate for 3 ECTS credits jointly issued by the History Department at Zurich University, the University of New Europe, and Off University. This reflects our commitment to creating a supportive learning environment where students can take intellectual risks and engage with sensitive topics.

Graded Assessment (Upon Request):

Some participants may require a traditional letter grade for transfer credit to their home institution. If your university does not accept pass/fail credits, you may request a formal grade at the beginning of the course. In such cases, assessment will be structured as follows:

Active Participation (50%): attendance, preparation of mandatory readings, contribution to class discussions.

**Assignment 1:** Writing History in the Making (50%): selection and framing of an event, conscious narrative choices, clear and coherent writing

OR

**Assignment 2:** Collaborative Textbook Annotation (50%): quality and depth of individual annotations, integration of diverse and/or comparative perspectives

Requirements for Course Completion:

To receive the certificate (whether pass/fail or graded), participants must:

- Attend at least 11 of the 14 sessions
- Complete all mandatory readings and participate in the discussions
- Submit Assignment 1 by the designated deadline
- Make substantive contributions to the collaborative annotation project

## Organization of the course

### Week ONE (Feb. 18):

Introduction to the course, its learning goals, course format and assignments. Discussion of participants' school experiences with history textbooks and their interests. Collective selection of the textbook chapter for the collaborative annotation project (Assignment 2).

**Presentation of a Case Study by the convenor:** Changes in slavery narratives in UK history textbooks over 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, reflections on the terms of Decolonisation and Empire.

## Mandatory Readings:

- Donington, Katie, Abdul Mohamud, Robin Whitburn, and Nicholas Draper. "Teaching Transatlantic Slavery: Curricular and Pedagogical Choices." In *Teaching Slavery: New Approaches to Britain's Colonial Past*, pp. 263-281. London: UCL Press, 2025

**Optional Readings:**

- Rampolla, Mary Lynn. *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*. 10th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2021, ch. 2

**Week TWO (Feb. 25):**

Who or what is the **subject of history** whose perspective structures the narrative of the Past. Common subjects: the **People** (popor/narod) - collective, often ethnically defined; the **Nation** - cultural-ethnic community; the **Country/State** (țara) - political-territorial entity; **Class**- social-economic groups; **Territory**- geographic space and its inhabitants.

**Presentation of a Case Study by the convenor**(two textbooks of Romanian History):

1. Aron Petric și Gh. I. Ioniță, *Istoria Contemporană a României. Manual pentru clasa a X-a*(București, 1983).
2. Alexandru Barnea et al., *Istorie. Manual pentru clasa a IX-a*(București, 2014).

**Paradigms:**

- Social conflict → National continuity
- Class struggle → State sovereignty
- People's liberation → Country's European integration
- Soviet liberation (1944) → Soviet occupation

**Mandatory Readings:**

- Solonean, Dana. "Textbooks, Markets, and Meanings: Educational Reform in Postcommunist Romania." *Journal of Educational Sciences* 26, no. 2 (2025): 70-89. <https://doi.org/10.35923/JES.2025.2.05>.

**Optional Readings:**

- Nalin, Speranta Dumitru. "History Teaching in Romania," *Diogenes* 49, no. 194 (2002): 40-46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/039219210204919407>.
- Hildebrandt-Wypych, Dobrochna, and Alexander Wiseman, eds. "Contrasting Perspectives on School Textbook Development and Discourse Worldwide." In *Comparative Perspectives on School Textbooks: Analyzing Shifting Discourses on Nationhood, Citizenship, Gender, and Religion*, pp. 1-17. New York: Palgrave.

**Week THREE (March 4):**

Can a textbook avoid being ethnocentric? The Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot historical narratives are embedded within larger national-historical frameworks (Greece and Turkey) with their fully developed national historiographies, myths, and memory regimes. Cypriot history textbooks operate not merely as local accounts of conflict, but as peripheral extensions of external national histories, Greek and Turkish. The 'other' emerges simultaneously as an adversary on the island and as representative of a rival civilizational project.

**Paradigms:**

- Hellenic continuity vs. Islamic presence
- Enosis (union with Greece) vs. Taksim (partition/Turkish Cypriot self-determination)
- Union with Europe vs. European colonialism
- Aboriginal inhabitants of the island vs. Mix of population waves

- Hellenistic Culture vs. Anatolian Economy

**Presentation of a Case Study by the convenor**(Greek and Turkish Cypriote Histories):

1. Pandelidou, Angeliki et al. [Παντελίδου, Αγγελική et al.], eds. *Ιστορία της Κύπρου, Μεσαιωνική - Νεότερη (1192 - 1974)*[*History of Cyprus, Medieval- Modern(1192 - 1974)*]. Leukosia: Ekdoseis YAP, 2014 [1992]
2. Özkul, Ali Efdal, ed. *Kıbrıs ve Kıbrıs Türk Tarihi*[*Cyprus and Turkish Cypriot History*]. Vols. 8-10. Lefkoşa: KKTC Milli Eğitim ve Kültür Bakanlığı, 2021.

**Mandatory Readings:**

- Papadakis, Yiannis. *History Education in Divided Cyprus: A Comparison of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Schoolbooks on the "History of Cyprus."* PRIO Cyprus Centre Report 2/2008. Nicosia: PRIO Cyprus Centre, 2008.

**Optional Reading:**

- Philippou, Stavros. "'Europe' as an Alibi: An Overview of Twenty Years of Policy, Curricula and Textbooks in the Republic of Cyprus – And Their Review." *European Educational Research Journal* 11, no. 3 (2012): 428-445. <https://doi.org/10.2304/eej.2012.11.3.428>
- Perikleous, Lukas, Meltem Onurkan-Samani, and Gülen Onurkan-Aliusta. "Those Who Control the Narrative Control the Future: The Teaching of History in Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Schools." *Historical Encounters* 8, no. 2 (2021): 124-139. <https://doi.org/10.52289/hej8.207>.

**Week FOUR (March 11):**

How are medieval pasts constructed as national origins? This session examines how medieval history becomes a political tool through the construction of national origin myths. The class explores how modern states retroactively project stable peoples, territories, and political identities into a medieval world that was fluid, multilingual, and structurally fragmented. Using Geary's conceptual framework, the class analyzes four case clusters:

1. Medieval Rus' in Russian and Ukrainian textbook traditions
2. Constantinople as a contested symbol of imperial inheritance
3. Medieval Western Europe as the foundation of modern national genealogies (Charlemagne and Aachen) and the retroactive ethnicization of medieval populations
4. Crusading narratives as viewed by WHOM?(Traditional narrative vs. Amin Maalouf)

Guiding questions:

- What does Geary mean by "the myth of nations"?
- Why are medieval sources especially susceptible to nationalist reinterpretation?
- What is at stake politically in claiming medieval ancestry?

**Mandatory Readings:**

- Geary, Patrick. "Introduction. The Crisis of European Identity," In Id., *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 1-14
- Geary, Patrick. "European as Zulu," In *Ibid.*, pp. 157-174.

**Optional Reading:**

- Maalouf, Amin. *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* (London: Saqi Editions, 2013).
- Georgiy Kasianov. *Memory Crash. Politics of History In and Around Ukraine, 1980s-2010s* (CEU Press, 2022).

**Week FIVE (March 18):** Invited expert **Dr. Daryna Zhyvohliadova**

Together with the students, we will trace the history and culture of independent Ukraine through key artifacts, texts, and artistic works. Each of these milestones not only represents a specific historical moment but also symbolizes the broader struggle for sovereignty, democracy, and cultural identity. By looking at key textbooks, as well as the works of artists, poets, and musicians, we will see how culture and heritage are deeply intertwined in Ukraine's path of independence.

**Paradigms:**

- Distinct Ukrainian historical trajectory vs. Soviet historical narrative
- Decolonization and national identity formation vs. Imperial legacy
- Modern Ukrainian history vs. Broader European democratic history

**Mandatory Readings:**

- Plokhiy, Serhii. *The Gates of Europe*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.  
[PDF\(Focus on part V\)](#)

**Optional Readings:**

- Hrushevskiy, Mykhailo. *History of Ukraine-Rus'. Volume 1: From Prehistory to the Eleventh Century*. [https://shron1.chtyvo.org.ua/Hrushevskiy/History\\_of\\_Ukraine-Rus\\_Volume\\_1\\_From\\_Prehistory\\_to\\_the\\_Eleventh\\_Century\\_anhl.pdf?PHPSESSID=peuko759cja7qs3p07se825](https://shron1.chtyvo.org.ua/Hrushevskiy/History_of_Ukraine-Rus_Volume_1_From_Prehistory_to_the_Eleventh_Century_anhl.pdf?PHPSESSID=peuko759cja7qs3p07se825)
- Snyder, Timothy. *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018.
- Applebaum, Anne. *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine*. London: Allen Lane, 2017.

**Week SIX (March 25):** Invited expert **Dr. Yadviha Lukashyk**

Narratives on the First World War in Central Europe

**Week SEVEN (Apr. 1):** Invited expert **Dr.Habil. Elena Monke**

Methodology of Historical Research and School Teaching

Part 1: How a research project is built - Using examples from my dissertations in preschool pedagogy I will exemplify how to formulate research questions, collect and analyze sources, structure arguments, and, thus, summarize common challenges for young researchers. The goal is to show students the process of research from the inside, which is transferable to any academic discipline, including history.

Part 2: Constructing textbooks and cultural narratives. Using examples from my textbooks on children's literature I will exemplify how to select and structure materials, shape values and cultural memory, reflect on historical and social context. The goal is to demonstrate how texts create narratives and influence the understanding of culture and history. I will also reflect on the role of textbooks in shaping the educational process and the balance between textbooks and the teacher's role.

**Week EIGHT (Apr. 8): FREE!****Week NINE (Apr. 15):** Invited expert **Dr. Tetiana Shyshkina**

Omitted stories of Jewish actors in History of Central and Eastern Europe

**Week TEN (Apr. 22):**Invited Expert: **Dr. Eduardo Angel Cruz**

## Who Conquered Whom? Rethinking "Conquest" in Latin American History Textbooks

Description: This lecture is an invitation to critically examine the writing of history textbooks in Mexico and Latin America through the lens of a single term: Conquista. Rather than approaching the "Spanish Conquest" as a neutral historical process, the lecture will show how the use of this term by sixteenth-century Spanish soldiers, chroniclers, and clerics helped to legitimise what was, in many cases, illegal military occupations. The session will then explore how this same concept became central to the self-legitimising narratives of (white) Creole elites in the nineteenth-century independent republics. Lastly, the lecture questions how and why this politically charged category has been transmitted in Spanish and Latin American curricula as "neutral history," and concludes by encouraging students to reflect on the power of historical language in shaping collective memory.

### Mandatory Readings:

- Matthew Restall, "Prologue. Invention". In: *When Montezuma Met Cortés: The True Story of the Meeting That Changed History* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018).
- Matthew Restall, "Epilogue. Halls of Montezumas". In: *Ibid.*

### Week ELEVEN (Apr. 29): Invited expert **Dr. Yelözer Kılıç**

From artefacts to narratives: how prehistory is written in textbooks

Unlike historians of later periods, prehistoric archaeologists work without written documents. Their primary evidence is material culture: objects, technologies and traces of past activities of human and nonhuman actors. But how do these silent materials become stories about identity, gender, culture and society? And how do those stories end up in textbooks?

In this session with Dr Sera Yelözer, we explore how knowledge about prehistoric identity is produced, debated and communicated. Students will learn how archaeologists use scientific methods and theoretical approaches to interpret material evidence and turn it into historical narratives. Focusing on case studies from Anatolia (modern-day Türkiye) alongside examples from West Asia and Europe, we will trace how ideas about prehistoric identity have changed over time and how they are presented in educational and popular contexts, such as museums. We will also critically examine how interpretations of the deep past have sometimes been shaped by modern political and ideological assumptions.

### Mandatory Reading:

- Baysal, E.L., & Yelözer, S. 2026. Bodies and behaviours: archaeological material culture and the interpretation of identity at the Neolithic transition. In G. Longhitano, K. Grömer, A. Dickey, G. Muti, S. Hitchens (eds.), *Personal adornment in past societies: weaving and wearing identity. Interdisciplinary Contributions to Archaeology*. Springer, Cham: 227–243. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-03906-4\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-03906-4_12)

### Week TWELVE (May 6): Invited expert: **Dr. Tsvetomira Antonova**

This session explores how school textbooks shape collective memory and national identity, using the 10th-grade history curriculum in Bulgaria as a case study. We will discuss concepts such as memory wars and the "usable past," with particular attention to omissions in the narrative, including the human cost of Stalinization and the memory of the victims of communism. The class invites critical reflection on how educational narratives influence public understandings of history.

### Week THIRTEEN (May 13): Invited expert: **Dr. Reem Turkmani**

Discussion of cultural and historical heritage of Syria and the ways to preserve and transmit it

**Week FOURTEEN (May 20):** Course Evaluation, Group discussion

Participants discuss their experiences with the course materials, methodologies, and assignments, sharing how their understanding of history textbooks and historical narratives has evolved over the semester.

This session includes a structured group discussion where students reflect on key themes encountered throughout the course: how different national contexts shape historical narratives, the challenges of engaging with politically sensitive topics, and the possibilities for teaching contested histories in non-teleological ways.

Participants will also share their experiences with the collaborative annotation project (Assignment 2), discussing the process of collective knowledge production and the diverse perspectives that emerged through their annotations.

The session concludes with course evaluation, where participants provide feedback on the course format, readings, guest presentations, and assignments.

**NO Mandatory or Optional Readings**