



Call for Papers

Where: **University of Erfurt**

When: **February 22 – 23, 2024**

The **Deadline** for submission: **July 31, 2023**

Why Intelligence? The political and social roots of a scientific object

‘In our opinion, intelligence [...] is, first of all, a faculty of knowledge (*connaissance*), which is directed to the outside world.’ With this definition, the pioneer of the experimental study of intelligence, Alfred Binet, promoted his research programme. It was not an abstract philosophical entity but an ability to communicate with the ‘outside world’ that became a new research subject. From the second half of the 19th century, intelligence as a research object gained currency in both natural and social sciences. In the early 20th century, the scientific discourse on intelligence not only dominated the experimental studies on the mental abilities of humans and animals but also significantly influenced the agenda of non-experimental disciplines. Obviously, the discourse on intelligence reflected all the dominant political issues of the time: heredity and social milieu; equality and inequality; class or national affiliation; and many others. The triumph of intelligence in the 20th century made it one of the most popular research subjects in the history of science. Artificial and swarm intelligence, the sociological critique of the ‘I.Q. ideology,’ the racism of intelligence research, and the role of the discourse on intelligence in popular culture have been the central issues in recent scholarship.

Our workshop aims to change the focus of these debates. We intend to discuss not intelligence research itself but **the social and political conditions that allowed intelligence to advance to its leading position in the scientific agenda**, as well as **the constellation of developments in both sciences and humanities that prepared its brilliant career**. Our approach is informed by the recent trends in **Political Epistemology**; we are primarily interested in attempts to use the concept of intelligence for examining **political bodies such as nation, race, class, social stratum** etc. Therefore, **the questions of social and political grouping** rather than the traditional perspective of differential psychology will come to the fore

in our discussion. Along with **the political background of the concurrence (and ‘cooperation’) of intelligence with other concepts such as mind, talents, wit, Geist** etc., we intend to study in what ways debates on **animal or ‘biological’ intelligence** influenced **the applicability of this concept to the analysis of collective entities**. Additionally, the appearance of the public and sociological discourse on **the intelligentsia as the ‘intelligence’ of a nation** (which had special relevance in Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe) will represent an essential issue in our agenda. We also greatly welcome papers that thematise the early stages of the development of **intelligence as an integral part of the theories of civilisation** as well as the discourses on **all-human intelligence (e.g., noosphere)**. When debating these issues, we expect our discussion to go beyond the routinised view of intelligence and to open up a new field in the history of intelligence research.

We kindly invite you to submit your **abstract** (circa **300 words**) as well as a **short CV (or a link to your profile website)** via email wissenschaftsgeschichte@uni-erfurt.de by **July 31, 2023**. We particularly welcome contributions that deal with contexts beyond Western Europe and North America.

For any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our organising team:
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