

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS Doctoral workshop

The Sea

École française de Rome, 23 -27 February 2026

Launched in the mid-1990s, the doctoral workshop on *Law, History, and Social Sciences* will devote its next edition, scheduled for February 23–27, 2026, to the theme of the “sea.” This topic continues to draw the attention of scholars in the humanities and social sciences, given the fundamental role attributed to it by the natural sciences in the context of the ongoing global climate emergency. From a historical perspective, beginning at the end of the 15th century, disputes arose over encroachments into territorial waters and dominion over the seas following the discovery of the West Indies. Pope Alexander VI’s famous bull *Inter caetera* of May 4, 1493, marked the beginning of a war between empires, whose most significant theoretical expression emerged in the early 17th century with Hugo Grotius’s well-known treatise on the freedom of the seas. The sea has gradually become a system whose commercial, geopolitical, and emerging international legal significance has challenged the hegemony of the so-called tellurocracies (the states of continental Europe) to the benefit of the so-called thalassocracies. This binary model is not the result of innocent hermeneutics, but corresponds to the overcoming of the Westphalian order that, at the beginning of the 20th century, favored the intensification of nationalistic antagonisms and, consequently, the expansionist policies of states.

Modern historiography, for its part, has regarded the sea—particularly the Mediterranean—as a space of circulation for people, goods, and techniques. The subsequent widening of this perspective to include the oceans has brought to light the competition among political empires and economic entities, such as the first major international trading companies. In Carl Schmitt’s ontological framework, “man is a being of the earth who treads the soil.” Yet what, then, becomes of humanity when the notion of a fixed point of immovable solidity on land is transposed onto a fluid and shifting entity such as the sea? A metaphysical question that sounds outdated, since it is no longer a matter of dualism between elements of the world conceived to infer rival anthropologies. Today, the sea assumes a fully systemic significance, asserting itself as both the framework and substance of two inherently global phenomena: human migration and the planet’s ecological upheaval. In the first instance, it functions as a space of transit—often interrupted—while in the second, it constitutes a surface for resource extraction and seabed exploitation on the one hand, and a site of aggression against terrestrial coasts on the other. The rise in the planet’s overall temperature plays a decisive role in both processes, given the considerable percentage of migration driven by climatic factors.

This scenario brings together a wide range of disciplines—from law, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy to cartography and geophysics, as well as literature and, indeed, psychoanalysis— all set in a historical context that, from Antiquity to the most pressing current events, reveals the distinctive nature of every reflection on the sea. Although primarily intended for doctoral students in Law, Humanities, and Social Sciences, the initiative also welcomes applications from the Natural and Environmental Sciences, which constitute an essential point of reference for completing the picture of the chosen theme for this new edition of the Doctoral Workshop.

The doctoral week will be organized as follow: from Monday to Friday, presentations by doctoral students will alternate with those by scientific experts on different time periods and topics, all related to the theme of the sea. Presentations must be held in one of the three languages accepted by the Atelier: Italian, French and English. Wednesday 25/2/2026 will be devoted to an excursion related to the theme of the sea, which is yet to be defined.

The École française de Rome offers 12 grants for young researchers (PhD students and post-docs from the European Union and other countries) who have carried out or are still carrying out research on the themes

and problems at the heart of the Workshop. The scholarships cover the costs of the stay in Rome; participants will cover their travel expenses.

APPLICATION

Applicants must send in PDF format:

1. « **lettre de motivation** » (one pdf) :

- >> a covering letter explaining the reasons for submitting an application;
- >> a summary of the project (2 pages, ca. 6000 characters);
- >> a cover letter;

2. « **CV** » (one pdf) :

- >> a brief *curriculum vitae* specifying language skills and any publications.

SENDING THE APPLICATION FILE

Applications must be sent **by 13/12/2026**, 4 p.m., Rome time. Applications files must be submitted online to:

https://candidatures.efrome.it/atelier_doctoral_en_droit_histoire_et_sciences_sociales_la_mer

Applicants will be selected on the basis of their project and will be notified of the grant **by December the 22nd 2025**. After notification, **by February the 2nd 2026**, they shall provide:

- the text of their presentation (ca. 10 pages, in one of the following languages: Italian, French or English);
- an Abstract of at least 3 pages in English.

Selected applicants are expected to attend the sessions **assiduously**. Their presentation will be commented by an expert in the field before the general discussion. The presentations deemed of the highest quality may be submitted to the editors of the École's review, *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*.

The Scientific Committee reserves the right to welcome applicants not selected to benefit from one of the fellowships, who will therefore be self-funding.

Scientific Committee:

Albane Cogné
Emanuele Conte
Sara Menzinger
Paolo Napoli

