

Situating universalisms. The transnational construction of *Homo sapiens* in the XX century

What we shall tentatively term the '*Homo sapiens* paradigm' emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War as a means of ensuring the sustainability of the restored peace. The 1950 UNESCO Statement on Race and its subsequent, numerous reformulations rested on two key universalist characteristics of the international organisation: the common origin of all human beings in *Homo sapiens*; and the idea of science as a universal way of knowing. This workshop aims to discuss the transnational construction of this paradigm, as well as the scientific and cultural artefacts that helped establish it from the 1920s onwards. To this end, we will examine the involvement of scientists both within their national scientific contexts, and in international scientific networks and programmes.

MSCA postdoctoral fellowship (Maastricht University and École française de Rome) & CNRS (Larhra, Lyon)



22-24
JUNE
2026

PIAZZA NAVONA
62

ORGANISATION

Maddalena Cataldi (MSCA postdoctoral fellow/CNRS)

CONTACTS

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ÉPOQUES MODERNE
ET CONTEMPORAINE

WORKSHOP

MONDAY 22 JUNE 2026

2:30 pm - 7 pm

Welcome

Albane Cogné (Head of the Modern and Contemporary Periods Section, EFR)

Opening remark

Maddalena Cataldi (MSCA postdoctoral fellow/ CNRS)

The ancestors of the 'new man' and the building of the Third Rome

Chair: Luc Berlivet (CNRS - Cermes3)

Stefano Cavazza (University Bologna)
A People of Believers: Folklorists and Religiosity during Fascism

Maddalena Cataldi (MSCA postdoctoral fellow/ CNRS)
Nationalist and Internationalist dimensions of the human origin researches in the making of the fascist capital

Valentina Bartalesi (Biblioteca Hertziana)
Regimes of visibility: notes on the display of prehistoric Art under fascism

Discussion

Coffee break

Keynote

Geert Somsen (Maastricht University)
Homo Sapiens' Pedigree: a History of Universalisms

TUESDAY 23 JUNE 2026

9 am - 12 am

Objects and the reparation of the colonial past: historical perspectives

Chair: Adèle Chevalier (CNRS - Centre Alexandre-Koyré)

Gani Jaelani (Universitas Padjadjaran/ Utrecht University)
Out of Nusantara, Out of Mind: The Political Afterlife of Java Man in Contemporary Indonesia

Carl-Gösta Ojala (Uppsala University)
Colonial Collecting and Homecoming in Sápmi: Histories of Collecting and Repatriation in the Nordic Countries

Discussion

Coffee break

Keynote

Mirjam Brusius (Professor of Global Heritage, History and Memory, University of Cologne)
The Architecture of Absence: Colonial Race Science, Entangled Histories, and the Division of German Memory

Lunch

1:30 pm - 6 pm

The origins of mankind between history of Africa and world prehistory: Pan-Africanism

Chair: Andrea Brazzoduro (Università di Napoli, l'Orientale)

Amzat Boukari-Yabana (PhD, Independent Researcher in African History and Civilizations)
Decolonization and the Periodization of Pan-African History

Géraldine Delley (Laténium, Université de Neuchâtel)
Dating the past at home : scientific autonomy and the C14 laboratory project in Dakar

Discussion

Visit of Museo delle Civiltà accompanied by **Myriam Pierri** (Archaeologist officer and Curator of the Iron Age collections, Head of the historical and photographic archives)

WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE 2026

9 am - 12 am

The origins of mankind between history of Africa and world prehistory: UNESCO

Chair: Geert Somsen (Maastricht University)

Saul Dubow (Smuts Professor of Commonwealth History, University of Cambridge)
Human Diversity or the Unity of Humankind? From the 1947 Pan-African Congress to the Unesco Statements on Race, 1950-67

Larissa Schulte Nordholt (Leiden University)
African Historicity and UNESCO's General History of Africa

William Carruthers (University of Essex)
Humanity Unsettled: UNESCO, Nubia, and the Persistence of Race

Discussion

Coffee break

Discussion

Lunch