Description of chair

Cultural History/Cultuurgeschiedenis
Utrecht University, Faculty of Humanities,

1. General

The chair ‘Cultural History’/’Cultuurgeschiedenis’ (1,0 fte) will be established at the Department of History and Art History of the Faculty of Humanities. The chair will be appointed for a period of five years. After positive evaluation, the position will be converted into a permanent one.

2. Academic relevance of the chair

Although the study of the cultural aspects of the past has always been an important aspect of the study of history ever since people started to recover and recreate the past, the subject in the West developed out of Renaissance antiquarianism and 19th-c. History of Art. It has never lost touch with archaeology and art, and has remained in step with expanding its territory from ‘high’ culture in the spirit of Jacob Burckhardt to popular culture in the 1970s. After the rise of social history, poststructuralism, the cultural turn, the linguistic turn and an increasing attention to race, class and gender as categories of analysis made cultural history the pre-eminent sub-discipline for theoretical reflection of the pursuit itself of history as a cultural product reflecting and impacting relations of power. Since cultural history itself has always been difficult to pinpoint as an institutionalised discipline (integrating historians of literature, art, philosophy and media of all periods), it is inherently self-reflective and critical. The special interest in the Theory of History and the Theory of the Humanities tout court, is evidenced by the attention to the History of History (material conditions, participation, memory and identity) and to the Practices of History (methods, public history, praxiography, history of the body).

Recent developments

Four developments come to the fore:

a. As a result of the special attention to theory and methods, Cultural History acts as the locus for the reflection on and development of digital humanities. Whereas quantitative history used to be applied largely by economic and social historians, the digital turn has led to the development of instruments to map styles, sentiments, mentalities, cognitions and the way in which these move and develop across time and space. The importance of this development is mirrored in the opening of a Centre for the Digital Humanities at Utrecht University in 2020 to advance cross-disciplinary cooperation.

b. Covering the theory and history of history, the History of Knowledge is today strongly represented amongst cultural historians, who are keen on analysing how knowledge and power are culturally linked. History of Knowledge is a relatively new domain that redefines history of science as a now culturally aware historical discipline that no longer focusses on internalist history of ideas but on socially contextualised and culturally aware investigation of the production, circulation and recreation of knowledge as a situated human product. The way in which the knowledge-producing human body is situated in institutional settings and social networks plays a central role. Since 2020, Utrecht University hosts a new Open Access Journal for the History of Knowledge, that acts as an international focal point bringing together culturally minded historians about all periods and regions.

c. In the past decades, fierce debates on racism, gender discrimination and global warming have been dominating the public sphere. Since the polarisation of society that occurred after 9/11, the rise of Radical Islam and the War on Terror has put the study of collective identities high on the scholarly agenda: the reconstitution and reappropriation of the past to foster the current agendas of societal groups has led to an increased focus on matters of heritage, memory and identity. The question of who owns the past, in particular the processing of traumas of war, imperialism, discrimination and exploitation will feature high on the societal agenda in the next decade, as groups have more and more opportunities to organize themselves bottom-up and creating campaigns, organisations or new ‘pillars’ that categorically dismiss the reasonings of other groups as closed systems of discourse.
d. A last development that needs stressing is the rebound of social history, leading to an integrated socio-cultural approach. Cultural History is in step with a broader rapprochement of social studies and humanities (evidenced by the recent merger of the two by NWO and ERC into the SSH domain). For some in the field, this development marks a moving back to a more engaged study of societal groups in which conventional social history has become more sensitive to cultural theory.

3. Positioning in the Department of History and Art History

Research
The chair will be embedded in the Cultural History group at the department History and Art History and will be working in one of the four fields mentioned above. In each of those fields a research structure exists, either in the department or in the faculty of Humanities.

Teaching
The Cultural History group is responsible for substantial parts of the BA-programmes Geschiedenis and History (World History, the historiographical and theory of history courses) and runs a specialization (Verdiepingspakket) entitled ‘The Power of Culture’ in the second year of the BA. The group is responsible for a (one year) Master programme Cultural History of Modern Europe and currently coordinates the research master History. The professor of Cultural History will teach at all levels of the History programme.

Impact on society
In addition to fundamental research the department of History and Art History, as well as the faculty of Humanities, explicitly focus on social involvement. Therefore, the chair is expected to contribute to the pursuit of social relevance of research in cultural history. For instance, the study of heritage, memory and identity already plays an important role in the cultural history group.

4. National and international positioning

Cultural history is securely institutionalised in Dutch academia: there is a full chair of Cultural History of Europe at the Radboud University in Nijmegen (Jan-Hein Furnée) and at the Free University in Amsterdam (Inger Leemans). In addition, several other chairs, such as those of Arnoud Visser in Textual Culture in the Renaissance (Utrecht University), of Herman Paul in the History of Humanities (Leiden University), of León Hanssen in Cultural history/Dutch literature (University of Tilburg) and of Joep Leerssen in European Studies (University of Amsterdam) can be classified as Cultural History. Typically, chairs in the history of religion or languages resort under various labels such as Ancient or Medieval History or Language & Culture Studies, and can hence be classified as specific domains of generic Cultural history. Antiquity and the Middle Ages tend to have their own research groups and postgraduate teaching programmes. Utrecht has a leading position in the Cultural Historical landscape of the Netherlands and the permanent staff of UU’s cultural history section is the largest in Europe.

Since 1995, Dutch academia has its own national Research School for Cultural History, the above-mentioned Huizinga Instituut. Since 2018, this school has its headquarters at Utrecht University (directed by prof. Arnoud Visser). It runs a post-graduate teaching curriculum for research master students, and predominantly for PhD students from across the country.

Utrecht University is the only university with a Master’s programme dedicated specifically to Cultural History (the Radboud University runs a far broader Master’s programme in Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies). The master in the Cultural History of Modern Europe allows the group to disseminate its research interests in cultural modernity in its European and global dimensions. This Master programme has parallel tracks in English and Dutch and annually about 30-35 students, half of whom follow the English track (about 30% of the students are internationals themselves).

Very few European universities have separate research or teaching programmes in cultural history, since these programmes are mostly based on geographical areas or periods. A comparable research group is the History since 1750 group at KU Leuven, which specializes in the history of knowledge and science, historiography and historical culture and cultural infrastructure and cultural transfers and with whose members several researchers from the Cultural History group collaborate. In terms of approach and quality of research the Leuven and Utrecht groups are similar. The Dutch and Belgian groups share an interest in making cultural history accessible to a broader audience.
Overall, the Cultural History group at Utrecht is the most recognizable in The Netherlands. It runs a Master’s programme that is unique in Europe. It is also successful in drawing in external research funding, with currently two associate professors running their own ERC Consolidator projects, involving together 3 postdocs and 5 PhDs, and 3 more PhDs funded through NWO and the ITN Marie Curie programme. The section has two senior researchers who hold a professorial chair (one externally funded, the other one part-time in Nijmegen), one senior professor who is head of Department of History and Art History, and two assistant professors with an internally funded smaller research project. One colleague is the country’s liaison between academic historians and history teaching at secondary school, and another colleague is paid externally (ERASMUS+) to edit a new open access handbook for Teaching Europe in the 21st Century.

7. **Contextual analysis**

The chair will be a member of the Cultural History group, which is one of seven groups of the Department of History and Art History. The chair is expected to be able to take a position in the core team leading this group and contribute to organizational tasks within the department of History and Art History including by taking up rotating board memberships/directorates. Also, the candidate is expected to play an active part in the university broad multidisciplinary strategic theme Institutions for Open Societies. In the Department of History and Art History there is a strong sense of co-leadership. The chair will be expected to share authority with the rest of the group in a system of rotating administrative responsibilities.

8. **Profile of the occupant of the chair**

The chair in Cultural History promotes research, education and dissemination of knowledge in the field of social history. The chair:

- initiates and stimulates research within the Cultural History group within the Department of History and Art History and the strategic research theme Institutions for Open Societies;
- develops new externally funded research projects;
- contributes to and supervises teaching and curriculum development within the School of History and Art History;
- contributes to the visibility of the field of study both within and beyond the Faculty of Humanities and the Dutch academic world;
- initiates, and participates in, activities aimed to disseminate academic knowledge to the wider public;
- is responsible for organizational tasks and management within the department of History and Art History, the Faculty of Humanities and Utrecht University.

**Required competences**

With regard to research, the candidate:

- has wide-ranging expertise and qualities in Cultural History,
- has excellent qualifications, evident from leading publications on themes that are relevant to the chair;
- has proven to be able to form an own line of research within the framework as described above;
- has supervisory skills, evidenced by coaching of young researchers, especially PhD students;
- has a successful track record in attracting substantial research grants from external funding agencies or demonstrates the potential and willingness to do so;
- shows an openness towards interdisciplinary collaboration;
- has an international orientation, evidenced by international research networks.

With regard to education, the candidate:

- is a teacher who is motivated and able to motivate others;
- has demonstrable experience in course and curriculum development;
- has demonstrable excellent didactic skills;
- is able to contribute to all aspects of the teaching program of the section;
• is competent in the English language and is able to teach in English.

With regard to knowledge dissemination the candidate:

• has a network of formal and informal contacts both within and beyond the academic world;
• has broad experience in shaping the social relevance of the chair’s theme;
• is able to develop and extend research results in cooperation with social partners.

With regard to management, the candidate:

• has experience as a project manager;
• has strong communicative and organizational skills;
• is able to work as a team player;
• has relevant leadership and social skills;
• has the capacity to function as leader of a research.