



Call for Papers

# “Before the Last Straw”. Omens, Thresholds, and Signs of Crisis in the Historiographical Construction of the Event

Student Conference 2026, 7th Edition

Università degli Studi di Pavia

*“Before the Last Straw”. Omens, Thresholds, and Signs of Crisis in the Historiographical Construction of the Event* is a conference organized by the PhD Programme in History at the University of Pavia. It is addressed to early-career researchers — PhD candidates, postgraduate students, and junior scholars — working on thesis or research projects in Archaeology, and in Ancient, Medieval, Early Modern and Contemporary History. The Student Conference aims to foster dialogue among scholars from different backgrounds within a stimulating and enriching environment in which to discuss their research.

In a historical moment marked by political upheavals, social crises, environmental catastrophes, wars, and new forms of collective mobilization, reflecting on the conscious choices — and the conscious non-choices — that precede moments of historical rupture becomes a useful and necessary tool for understanding the deep connection between decision and transformation.

Historical narrative has often highlighted the ‘last straw’ that triggered epochal changes. Iconic examples include Archduke Franz Ferdinand’s assassination in Sarajevo, the storming of the Bastille, or Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon — episodes that historiographical tradition has frequently taken as symbolic culminating points that crystallize prior tensions and ignite change.

The 2026 Student Conference seeks to shift the focus away from the final event to investigate the acts that immediately precede it and to ask whether it is possible to explore, with historical awareness, the suspended moment before rupture: the moment before the last straw. The expression ‘before the last straw’ (understood here as a historiographical category) may designate individual events or circumscribed situations — often marginal or undervalued — that anticipate a historical rupture and prefigure its unfolding. They do not constitute its direct cause, but its threshold or prelude: the point at which continuity begins to bend, even though emerging tensions have not yet fully expressed their potential effects.

By reflecting on these liminal moments, the Call invites contributions that analyse the singularity of a pre-rupture moment in which a conscious or unconscious decision — whether by an individual or a community — or the absence of a decision shaped the course of events. The aim is to recognize the tension of what is possible in a situation of stasis, and to reevaluate the importance of events that historiography tends to define as “decisive” only ex post, in light of their later consequences.

The conference encourages an interdisciplinary discussion around this threshold-category, inviting participants to reconsider the unstable equilibria that precede rupture.

Contributions may explore (but are not limited to):

### **Political and Military History**

- Institutional changes and unfinished reforms: failed reforms as anticipations of collapse (from Solon’s reforms to the Weimar Constitution).
- Revolutions and transitions: pre-revolutionary episodes.
- Microhistories and borderlands: local episodes or ‘accidents’ that anticipate broader conflict (border clashes, military mutinies, attacks, failures of deterrence).
- Military history and strategic theory: how doctrines and technological innovations can constitute moments ‘before the last straw’ that render conflict inevitable.

### **Intellectual History**

- Theoretical and conceptual elaborations ahead of their time that contribute to triggering new worldviews.
- Specific cultural cases that functioned as intellectual thresholds.

### **Environmental History**

- Science, prediction, and responsibility: the use (or non-use) of knowledge in preventing disaster.
- Decisions or non-decisions and measures that indirectly contributed to climate/environmental disasters and had concrete consequences for human life.

### **Socio-Economic History**

- Financial crises: changes in preceding policies, speculative bubbles leading to crisis, the weeks of rumours before collapse, or rising interest rates preceding bankruptcy.
- Economic and financial policies: the choice of new policies that initiate subsequent change, the imposition of new tariffs, increased state intervention in industrial production, the sale of enterprises that enabled the rise of major corporations.
- Infrastructure: the opening of a construction site, the preparation of land for future transformation.
- Urban history: preparatory stages of urban transformations such as laws for expanding city boundaries or the acquisition of lots for new building projects.

## Archaeology and Landscape History

- Archaeological readings of settlement and territorial thresholds: micro-changes in the landscape that anticipate crises or shifts in power.
- Archaeological indicators of instability: environmental stress, agricultural decline, changes in trade networks.
- Settlement, territorial, and landscape transformations (abandonments, refoundations, population movements, urban contractions) as thresholds foreshadowing political or economic change.

## Practical Information

**Location:** University of Pavia

**When:** May 18-19, 2026

**Contacts and Information:** [studentconference@unipv.it](mailto:studentconference@unipv.it)

**Website:** <https://studentconference.unipv.it>

**Participants:** MA students, MA graduates, postgraduate students, and PhD candidates (up to and including the 37th cycle) in Ancient, Medieval, Early Modern and Contemporary History, and Archaeology.

**Application deadline:** February 8, 2026.

The Student Conference will be held in person. Remote participation will be considered in cases of special need (e.g., health issues) indicated at the time of application.

Proposals for presentations (15 minutes, in Italian or English) should be sent in the form of an abstract, clearly stating the research question, methodology, and expected results (max. 400–600 words, with a bibliography of 5–10 titles). To apply, please fill in the form at the following [link](#).

Submissions will undergo anonymous peer review. Selected candidates will be contacted by email by March 15. Participants must submit a draft of their paper by May 4.

The organizing committee reserves the right to publish conference proceedings, in full or in part.

### Organizing Committee:

Giusy Belfiore - PhD candidate in Archaeology

Mattia Capponi - PhD candidate in Ancient History

Giulia Cozzi - PhD candidate in Archaeology

Antoine Salvatore Cusmà Piccione Cadetto - PhD candidate in Ancient History

Sofia Degli Esposti - PhD candidate in Early Modern History

Matteo Ferro - PhD candidate in Ancient History

Federico Meneghini Sassoli - PhD candidate in Contemporary History

Silvia Pin - PhD candidate in Contemporary History

Gabriele Rossi - PhD candidate in Contemporary History

Omar Scarone - PhD candidate in Archaeology

Laura Strada - PhD candidate in Ancient History

Matteo Stroppiana - PhD candidate in Early Modern History

Anna Tardivo - PhD candidate in Early Modern History