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Dynasties and Networks: Knowledge in Academic Families

Thursday 18 September 2025 11:00 (20 minutes)

While the role of family networks at early modern universities has often been studied, the transmission of knowledge within these networks tends to receive less attention. This talk will present an attempt of a typology of family universities using the examples of Tübingen and Jena from the late 16th to the 18th centuries. Tübingen was characterised by the emergence of professorial dynasties - most notably those of the families Osiander, Bardili, Camerarius, and Gmelin - that had a strong presence at the university over many generations. Comparable dynasties did not exist at Jena, instead professorial families frequently married into each other, a practice that lasted well into the 19th century and created a network of family relations at the university. While such networks had an obvious function in providing protection for the individual professors, they tended to have less impact in establishing academic family traditions. The talk aims at highlighting how such traditions could shape knowledge as well as academic culture at early modern universities.

Short Biography

Gerhard Wiesenfeldt is a lecturer for History of Science in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne. He has worked extensively on the history of physical sciences in the Dutch Republic as well as on the role of experimental sciences at early modern universities. His main research project is focussed on tracing the connection between practical mathematics and academic philosophy at the University of Leiden from 1600-1800. He is also working on the role of family networks at early modern universities.

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Universities, families, knowledge traditions

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