

# Material Culture in the History of Physics

VIII. International Seminar funded by the Wilhelm and Else Heraeus Foundation

Deutsches Museum Munich, 23-27 February 2026

## Why do we study “material culture”?

Objects are rich sources of information about the production of scientific knowledge. While historians usually work in archives with historical documents trying to reconstruct theories and the social and cultural context of physics, not everything about the history of physics is recorded in textual form. We can gain new insights into the history of physics by analysing scientific instruments and foregrounding material aspects of science in historical narratives. This seminar introduces standard approaches to the analysis of objects and offers participants the opportunity to get hands-on experience with these techniques using collections at the Deutsches Museum.

## Structure and Content of the Seminar

The seminar consists of three parts: a theoretical part, a practical part, and individual follow-up work.

### **Theoretical Section (Workload 130h)**

In this first section, participants will explore the theoretical concepts of instrument studies that form the basis of our seminar: The Winterthur Model, the biography of objects, and experimental history of physics. Working in groups, participants will study one theoretical approach and prepare presentations on their findings. These presentations will be discussed on the first day of the practical section at the Deutsches Museum in Munich.

### **Practical Section (Workload 40h)**

The practical part of the seminar requires a one-week stay at the Deutsches Museum in Munich. During this week, we will work intensively with various material objects from the holdings of the Deutsches Museum. The sessions will also include activities that demonstrate the principles and value of experimental history of science as well as visits to the restoration workshop of the Deutsches Museum. The exhibitions of the Museum will be examined and discussed in terms of different display concepts. At the end of the seminar, participants will research an unknown object using the Winterthur model, and then will write a biography of the object. This research will form the basis for the essay that serves as examination. Please note that there is very little time for visiting the Deutsches Museum during the seminar – if you want to do this extensively, we suggest arriving a day earlier or extending your stay (at your own expense).

### **Follow-Up Section (Workload 130h)**

In the follow-up to the seminar, participants will use the experiences they gained during the seminar together with their methodological competences they have developed. They will write an essay on one of the objects they studied in Munich, applying the methodologies studied during the week and drawing on their analysis of the object.

## Details

- Who can apply? Masters and PhD students in the following fields: History of Science, Physics, Physics Education, as well as trainees in science and technology museums including respective university collections. A strong historical interest is a prerequisite for consideration. The letter of application should clearly state how the applicant can benefit from the seminar in his or her future career plans.
- Location: The seminar includes an online component at the beginning and an attendance section at the Deutsches Museum in Munich.
- Dates: The online section starts on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2025, and the attendance section in Munich extends five days starting on 23 February in the morning and ending on 27 February 2026 in the early afternoon (arrival on Sunday 22 February 2026).
- ECTS and Workload: The workload is 300hours, which means that participants will receive 10 ECTS for successful participation. They will get a certificate, which allows them to transfer the credits to their home university.
- Module examination: The module examination is an individual essay of 25,000 – 30,000 characters. The essay is due on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2026.
- How to apply? Please send a short CV (up to one page) and a letter explaining why you want to participate in the workshop (up to one page) **as one PDF file in English** to [julia.bloemer@uni-flensburg.de](mailto:julia.bloemer@uni-flensburg.de) before **15 November 2025**.
- Funding: The support from the Heraeus Foundation covers accommodation (five nights) at the Kerschensteiner Kolleg in Munich and travel expenses of up to €100 for participants from Germany, up to €300 for participants from Europe, and up to €1000 for participants from overseas.

## Lecturers

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