Dr. Stefan Donecker (Austrian Academy of Sciences/University of Tübingen)

**A Crime in Itself: “Vagabondage” as Social Deviancy in the Early Modern Era**

The mobility of marginalized social groups, such as vagrants and itinerant beggars, was a significant feature of everyday life, from the Middle Ages well into the nineteenth and even the twentieth centuries. Early modern theorists, in particular, argued that this traditional form of lower class mobility was deviant in itself, and that political and juridical authorities had a duty to regulate and prevent such “vagabondage”. David Barthel, jurist at the University of Leipzig in the 1670s, summarised the discussion in a succinct statement: *Vagam vitam exercere, per se delictum est* – a mobile life is, in itself, a crime, irrespective of the individual’s conduct. Such categorical condemnations of vagrancy led to intensive discussions among learned jurists, who debated the appropriate measures to be employed by the authorities to regulate the mobility of lower classes. Suggestions ranged from corporeal punishment and deterrence to forced labor and the internment in workhouses, part of a process described as the “Great Confinement” by Michel Foucault.

The proposed paper summarizes the scholarly debates on the allegedly subversive spatial mobility of lower classes, contrasting it to socially acceptable and even desirable forms of mobility among the elite in the same historical period (such as the *grand tour* of young noblemen). Furthermore, the paper will address the discursive distinction between historical images of the “vagabond” as the embodiment of deviant mobility and modern stereotypes of the “migrant”, highlighting a fundamental shift in the perception of spatially mobile individuals.