**The Italian Academies 1525-1700:**

**The First Intellectual Networks of Early Modern Europe**

**Application summary**

This project builds on and significantly enhances the AHRC-funded Resource Enhancement project 'The Italian Academies 1530-1650: a themed collection database' (<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/ItalianAcademies/>).

Academies represent a vital and characteristic dimension of early modern culture, but research on them remains limited due to difficulty of access to relevant information.
There were ca. 600 Academies in Italy in the period 1530-1700. International in membership, and in correspondence with scholars across Europe, they were fundamental to the development of the intellectual networks later defined as the 'République des Lettres', and to the dissemination of ideas in early modern Europe. Their membership included pioneering scientists, writers, artists, political thinkers, and representatives of both sexes and all social classes. The interests of the Academies ranged from the humanities, to the figurative and performance arts, natural sciences and medicine; many were interdisciplinary in their outlook and activities.
The Resource Enhancement project (phase 1) established an important scholarly resource on Academies in Naples, Padua, Bologna and Siena. Significant outcomes of that project include: (i) the discovery of many Academies not previously listed in existing scholarship; (ii) the evidence of the extensive networks of intellectual exchange within Italy and across Europe; (iii) the identification of the notable contribution of women including as authors, dedicatees and illustrators; (iv) the complex operation of censorship and its variability; (v) much vital new information from the analysis of dedications and dedicatees; (vi) the realization of the importance of illustrations in Academies' books for understanding their interests and operations.
The project greatly increased its research potential by: providing enhanced access to information about learned Academies (ca 250) in these centres; including over 1,000 digitized images relating to Academies.

The present project builds on these outcomes by:
(i) extending the scope of the database, by inputting data on Academies in both large and smaller centres, including: Rome and Venice, which had very large numbers of academies only a tiny fraction of which have been the subject of previous studies; cities such as Ferrara and Mantua, where the academies co-existed with the aristocratic courts; southern cities outside Naples (especially in Sicily) whose academies and their contribution to culture remains largely unexplored.
(ii) addressing the research questions and problems posed by the material already catalogued and developing research on new data. Among the important research questions to be addressed are:
What was the relationship between the Academies and institutions such as courts and Universities? What roles did women have within Academies? What was the role of illustrators and printers? How many foreigners took part in the life and publications of Italian Academies? How were intellectual discussions conducted and networks maintained? How did individual Academies relate to the demands of censorship? What were the relationships between Academies and the Spanish political and cultural establishment of southern Italy? How did Academies represent themselves through art and spectacle?
These questions are emphatically inter- and multidisciplinary and demand a collaborative approach. The research is being conducted by a project team, drawn from three major research institutions, who have important relevant expertise in the relevant research fields and in handling the data and in developing methodologies for analysing and presenting it.