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Contacts: Ole  
Sandmo  
(+47) 98 00 18 78  
[ole.sandmo@uib.no](mailto:ole.sandmo@uib.no)

## Historian Lyndal Roper Named 2026 Holberg Prize Laureate

(BERGEN, Norway) – Today, [the Holberg Prize](#)—one of the largest international prizes awarded annually to an outstanding researcher in the humanities, social sciences, law or theology—named Australian scholar Lyndal Roper as its 2026 Laureate.

Roper is the Regius Chair of History at the University of Oxford emeritus. She will receive the award of NOK 6,000,000 (approx. GBP 466,00 / USD 630,000) during a 4th June ceremony at the University of Bergen, Norway.

Professor Roper is internationally recognized as one of the leading scholars of early modern European history. Her pioneering studies have reshaped understandings of witch persecutions, the German Peasants' War (1524–1525), and the life and thought of Martin Luther, illuminating how gender, the body, psyche and power operated in social and religious conflicts of the sixteenth century. Roper's work is widely renowned for its methodological innovativeness and capacity to cut across disciplinary boundaries.

One of Roper's major works is *Oedipus and the Devil* (1994), which offers a new understanding of gender and culture by emphasizing that body and psyche cannot be separated from historical experience. The book explores the psychological forces at the intersection of the body, magic, religion and sexuality, and examines masculinity, brutality and notions of honour in early modern Europe. Roper shows how masculinity could function as a political instrument in the sixteenth century, and how violence, drinking, sexual behaviour and social discipline helped shape Protestant identity.

In *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (2004), Roper analyses hundreds of trial records from southern Germany, demonstrating that witch persecutions and other aspects of the Reformation era cannot be understood without attention to emotions, desire and fear. She shows how ideas about motherhood, ageing and fertility underpinned accusations of witchcraft, and explains why confessions were extracted and appeared convincing to contemporary judges. The book also illustrates how these images continue to influence cultural understandings of "the witch." It was awarded the Roland H. Bainton Prize in 2005.

Roper's research likewise provides a new perspective on Martin Luther, the most iconic figure of the Reformation. She shows how Luther's language, self-presentation, bodily experience and emotional expression shaped both his theology and his public leadership. In works such as *Der feiste Doktor* (2012), *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (2016), and *Living I Was Your Plague: Martin Luther's World and Legacy* (2021), Roper examines how everything from his use of coarse language to his projection of authority contributed to the political and religious upheavals of the sixteenth century. Luther thus emerges not only as a reformer, but as a historical individual shaped by the conflicts, cultural assumptions and psychological tensions of his time.

Roper's latest major study, *Summer of Fire and Blood: The German Peasants' War (2025)*, was awarded the Cundill History Prize in 2025. The book is the first major English-language account of the Peasants' War—the largest popular uprising in Europe before the French Revolution—in over a generation. This work offers a vivid reconstruction of the social tensions, religious ferment and political violence that fuelled one of the most consequential popular uprisings of the early modern period, while also illuminating the lived experiences of individuals caught up in the conflict. Other central works by Roper include *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (1989) and *The Witch in the Western Imagination* (2012).

Describing the key purpose of her work, the Laureate says: “Over the course of my career, I’ve been trying to do history from below, that is, I wanted a history that would include the voices of ordinary people, of all kinds, colours and classes, and of women in particular. I wanted new historical narratives that were not about great men and giant events.”

“Here I think my experience of being a mother made me realise how important what can’t be put into words is, and how communication doesn’t always need language,” she continues. “And I wanted gender to be front and centre of the kind of history we write. I wanted to bring people’s bodily experiences into history, and I wanted to think about people’s unconscious motivations too.”

In a statement, the Holberg Committee Chair, Professor Ann Phoenix said: “Lyndal Roper is one of the foremost scholars of early modern Europe and an outstandingly original historian. “Her research challenges previously established assumptions about early Modernity,” she continued. “Professor Roper is a highly worthy recipient of the 2026 Holberg Prize.”

### **The Norwegian Government and the University of Oxford Offer Congratulations**

The Norwegian Government also extends its congratulations. “On behalf of the Norwegian Government, I would like to congratulate Professor Lyndal Roper on receiving the 2026 Holberg Prize, says Minister of Research and Higher Education Sigrun Aasland.” “Her research offers new perspectives on European history and shows how ideas and beliefs from the past continue to shape us today. Roper’s work demonstrates why the humanities are essential for understanding the society we live in.”

The Head of the Humanities Division at the University of Oxford, Professor Dan Grimley, also offered his congratulations: “I am delighted that our Regius Chair of History, Professor Lyndal Roper, has been awarded the prestigious Holberg Prize,” said Professor Grimley. “The Prize is awarded to someone who has made a 'decisive influence on international research', and I cannot imagine a more deserving recipient than Professor Roper. Her research and publications have made a major contribution to our understanding of Martin Luther; the history of witchcraft; 16th-century German art; gender history; and more. Students and early career researchers in our History Faculty have benefited from her teaching and support over the years, and we are thrilled by the recognition that this award bestows.”

### **About the Laureate**

Lyndal Roper was the first woman, and the first Australian, appointed to the Regius Chair of History at the University of Oxford, a position she has held since 2011. She has held a professorship at Royal Holloway, University of London and has also taught at King’s College London, where she earned her PhD in 1985. Roper co-founded the Bedford Centre for the History of Women and Gender in 1999. The Regius Prize at Oxford was created in recognition of her mentorship of younger scholars and dynamic teaching. Roper is a Fellow of the British Academy, a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and a Fellow of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. She was awarded the Gerda Henkel Prize for lifetime achievement in history in 2016.

### **About the Holberg Prize**

Established by the Norwegian Parliament in 2003, the Holberg Prize is one of the largest annual international research prizes awarded for outstanding contributions to research in the humanities, social science, law or theology. The Prize is funded by the Norwegian Government through a direct allocation from the Ministry of Education and Research to the University of Bergen. Previous Laureates include Jürgen Habermas, Manuel Castells, Onora O’Neill, Cass Sunstein, Paul Gilroy, Sheila Jasanoff, Achille Mbembe, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Anyone holding an academic position at a university, academy or other research institution may nominate candidates for the Holberg Prize. The nomination deadline is 15 June each year. To learn more about the Holberg Prize, visit: <https://holbergprize.org/>. For press photos, biography, Committee citation, expert contact information, and more, see: <https://holbergprize.org/about-us/pressroom/>.