

International Workshop

Scepticism, unbelief, and theological reflection.

Tracing the narratives of religious doubt and deviation in ancient contexts

Date: 28-29 October 2024

Location: Seminar Room, 3rd floor, Austrian Archaeological Institute (OeAI), Dominikanerbastei 16, 1010 Vienna.

Organiser: OeAW-OeAI

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Interest in the study of atheism and unbelief in the context of ancient religions has grown considerably in recent years. Recent publications show that the analysis of positions that question beliefs and rituals in past religious contexts is now a hot topic in Classical Studies and History of Religions. Some of the topics that converge in all these publications concern philological discussions on emic terms, the application of modern theories to the sociological study of non-religion in historical contexts, the problem of defining belief and its relation to ritual in antiquity, the hermeneutic interpretation of unbelieving positions in ancient sources, and the diversity of sceptical positions within the same religious context, among many others.

The present workshop aims to bring together different researchers to discuss methodological and theoretical problems in the study of scepticism, doubt, unbelief and atheism in the dynamics of ancient religious contexts. The goal is to establish a dialogue between diverse scholars, disciplines, and historical religious backgrounds in order to develop a comparative and transhistorical perspective focusing on different chronotopes.

Questions addressed in papers may include:

- What modern theoretical frameworks are useful in the study of ancient unbelief?
- How can anachronisms be avoided in the historical study of religious doubt and atheism?
- What are the most accurate analytical concepts for discussing atheistic positions in historical perspective?
- Are unbelieving positions in the Greco-Roman context similar to those in other historical and cultural contexts such as India or the Near East?
- Is it possible to draw analogies between sceptical positions in the polytheistic context with monotheistic religiosities in ancient religiosities such as Judaism or early Christianity?
- Is it possible to write a “universal history” of unbelief?

- How does the study of ritual deviation and heterodoxy help to understand the dynamics of ancient religiosities?

Submission Guidance:

The participation of both senior and junior scholars is encouraged to develop not only a transhistorical, but also an intergenerational approach. Scholars interested in contributing a paper to the workshop should send the title and an abstract (up to 500 words) as a Word file or a PDF to ramon.soneiramartinez@oeaw.ac.at by **July 15th**. The workshop will be in English.

Accepted papers will be notified by July 20th. Confirmation of participation is needed by August 1st. If accepted, it is strongly recommended that papers be circulated one week prior to the event in order to get to know participants' ideas in advance and to better engage in the discussion. Each speaker will have 45 minutes (15 minutes presentation, 30 minutes discussion of the paper).

Based on the papers presented at the panel, a collective work will be published in the series *Forschungen zur antiken Religion (FAR)* of the Austrian Academy of Sciences Press.

If you have any questions, please contact the organizer.