

**UNIVERSITY
OF ERFURT**

Max-Weber-Kolleg

**III. Erfurt Summer School for Cultural and Social Studies
(ESSCSS)**

Religion and Society: Communities, Power Relations, and Materialities

17-21 August 2026 | Max-Weber-Kolleg | Erfurt



The Summer School is aimed at early-career researchers in the historical sciences, religious studies, and related disciplines (such as cultural anthropology or literary studies). Within the framework of the Summer School, questions of the distribution of power in past societies will be brought into focus, among them the aspect of lived religion, that is, everyday religious practices beyond theological debates, reflection, and confession. Using various theories and case studies, we aim to explore how religion, as a social phenomenon, has contributed to the formation of communities and power structures, while at the same time being subject to constant change and continual renegotiation of power relations. The attendants will gain a new set of theoretical and methodological skills that they can apply to their own projects, as well as with a deep understanding of a number of ancient and medieval cases studies.

Organizers

Elisabeth Begemann (Ancient History, Erfurt)

Mateusz Fafinski (Medieval Studies, Erfurt)

Enno A. Friedrich (Latin Philology, Rostock)

Anna-Katharina Rieger (Archaeology, Eichstätt)

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About the Summer School

We understand religion as a mutable factor—as religion in the making—never complete or fixed, but an active agent in the coexistence of communities of varying size and composition. Through religion, relationships within the group, as well as relationships with actors outside the group (gods, forces of nature, neighboring communities, enemies, ancestors, and the like), are negotiated and brought into relation. By incorporating a focus on materiality, attention will be directed toward lived practices and the material remains as a means of communication, such as votive

offerings, grave goods, wall paintings, graffiti, and manuscripts. They will be related to the content of ancient and medieval texts, with a particular interest in points where a close comparison can open up different perspectives. Another focus shall be laid on elements of form and genre (in comparison to content and historical context) such as motifs, wording, shapes, iconographies, reception processes and the like.

On the basis of case studies drawn from written and material sources, participants will discuss how historical inequalities in religious contexts were, on the one hand, theoretically justified and reflected upon, but on the other hand also overcome and adapted in everyday practice, depending on the conditions and needs of a community and/or its subgroups. Such a community may be conceived narrowly—for example, a family—but also much more broadly: a religious group, a community of class, a settlement community, or a city and its surroundings.

Together, we will discuss and develop in various formats during the Summer School (expert input, discussions, deepened reading, group work, and presentations) theoretical foundations that enable a reflective approach to sources with regard to theories of materiality and power discourses (including, explicitly, issues of gender, race, and class in historical societies and their religious contexts).

Application

We welcome applications from doctoral and post-doctoral researchers, as well as from excellent MA students in their last year of study. To apply, please provide a letter of motivation of about 300–400 words, outlining why you are interested in participating in the International Summer School and include a current CV as well as a brief sketch of your current research project to be discussed in the Summer School (1500–2000 words, incl. bibliography). If you have suggestions for specific topics you would like to address during the International Summer School or are interested in organizing a group session, please provide an additional description of the topic (up to 500 words). A maximum of 20 applicants can be accepted for the International Summer School.

Please send your application by 15th April 2026 with the subject line “Application International Summer School Max-Weber-Kolleg” in one single PDF-file (max. 10 MB) to mwk.bewerbungen@uni-erfurt.de.

Participation fee

For in-person participation, including lunches, coffee, a dinner, and excursion, we raise a fee of 100 EUR. In cases of financial hardship, the organizers may be able to help with financial support for the summer school.