Organisation:

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Max Weber Center, Research group "Religious Individualisation in Historical Perspective", University of Erfurt

The conference is co-sponsored by the Center for the Study of Ancient Religions, University of Chicago, and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Science Foundation).

Public and private in Ancient Mediterranean law and religion: an historical and comparative conference

Conference | 3-5 July 2013 | Max Weber Center, Erfurt
The distinction between public and private plays an essential role in modern understandings of nearly all aspects of social conduct. Indeed, it might even be said to be foundational in modern conceptions of the individual. The terms themselves derive from Latin roots, publicus and privatus. As with all such faux amis, the genealogical relation between lexemes works to efface the historical specificity of the distinctions mapped by this essential polarity, as well as the very meaning of the terms themselves. For example, whereas Anglo-American liberals and most Protestants conceive of religion as an essentially private matter—albeit for different reasons, within different frameworks—Cicero’s clauses on religion in On the Laws assign to all individuals both public and private religious lives, the one entailed by citizenship, the other normatively familial (Cicero De Legibus 2.19).

The aim of the conference is to explore the public-private distinction starting from Roman life, with a particular focus on comparative study and historical change. When does the concept of private religion emerge, and why? What work does the concept perform, and how does it change? Is it related to concepts of private reflection in the philosophical tradition? Does private reflection occur in private spaces, and how are these related to changing understandings of the domestic? Are the distinctions drawn differently in the grand metropolitan centers, where individuals exist in more atomized relation to one another, than they are in mid-size municipalities? Do changes occur in relation to mere population growth or are they better indexed to some increase in heterogeneity? How does the Roman notion of the privatus stand in relation to the modern individual or the subject?

To isolate and analyze the Roman context, we will devote half the seminar to other traditions of the ancient Mediterranean, notably those of classical and Hellenistic Athens, Rabbinic Judaism and early Islam. These present sufficient affinity in social structure and material culture, and possess appropriately robust evidentiary regimes, to permit fine-grained comparative study. The normative distinctions drawn in ancient regulation and modern analysis in these contexts have been quite different. It is not simply that other categories, such as household or oikos, come to the fore, but even the existence of any such analytic dyad as public/private or public/household has been questioned.

## Program

### Wednesday, 3rd July (Venue: Max Weber Center)

**14.00** | Clifford Ando, Jörg Rüpke (Erfurt)  
Welcome and introduction

### Section I: Law

**14.30** | Edward Harris (Durham):  
“Family, State and Murder: Pollution in Athenian Homicide Law”

**15.30** | Coffee

**16.00** | Judith Evans-Grubbs (Emory):  
“Making the private public: Illegitimacy and incest in Roman law”

**17.00** | Natalie Dohrmann (UPenn):  
“Mixed Messages: The Private Public Space of Rabbinic Legal Culture”

**19.00** | Dinner (Engelsburg)

### Thursday, 4th July (Venue: Max Weber Center)

### Section II: Religious practices and law

**09.00** | Rubina Raja (Aarhus):  
“Staging ‘private’ religion in Roman ‘public’ Palmyra”

**10.00** | William van Andringa (Lille):  
“M. Tullius...aedem Fortunae Augustae solo et peq(unia) sua: private foundation and public cult in a Roman colony”

**11.00** | Coffee

**11.30** | Salvo Randazzo (Catania):  
“Religio is causa: Disciplina giuridica e riflessi politici del culto associativo”

**12.45** | Lunch

**14.00** | Elisabeth Begemann (Erfurt):  
“A Private cult of Liberty and the Liberty of the Roman People”

**15.00** | Coffee

**15.30** | Ahmed El-Shamsy (Chicago):  
“Sin, Virtue and Privacy in Islamic Thought”

**16.30** | Claudia Bergmann (Erfurt):  
“Private and public at the meal in the world-to-come”

### Section III: Beliefs and concepts

**17.30** | Catherine Hezser (SOAS, London):  
“Between Public and Private: The Significance of the Neutral Domain (Carmelit) in Rabbinic Thought and the Roman Legal Category of Res Nullius”

**19.00** | Dinner (Petersberg)

### Friday, 5th July (Venue: IBZ, Michaelisstraße)

**09.00** | Esther Eidinow (Manchester):  
“Phaneran poiésean tén hautou dianoian tois theios: some ancient Greek theories of (divine and mortal) mind”

**10.00** | Coffee

**10.30** | Final discussion

**12.00** | Lunch

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