

Leaving the (Disciplinary) Comfort Zone: Lived Ancient Religion AD 1 to 800, Final conference of the ERC Advanced Grant “Lived Ancient Religion” vom 3. bis 5. April 2017

With a final conference bridging time periods and disciplines the ERC Advanced Grant “Lived Ancient Religion”, directed by Jörg Rüpke and Rubina Raja, concluded its five years of intense research.

Under the topic of “Leaving the (Disciplinary) Comfort Zone – Lived Ancient Religion AD 1 to 800”, about 25 internationally renowned colleagues were invited to Eisenach from 3rd to 5th April. The conference aimed rather at an implementation and adaptation of the project’s results into the larger field of religious studies of the Mediterranean than on presenting achievements. Therefore the invited speakers came from a variety of disciplinary contexts (Jewish Studies, Theology, Late Antiquity, Early Christian Studies) and not only from the inner circles of the LAR-project. They were asked to test, criticize and contextualize definitions or results from the LAR-project in their fields of research. Chronologically and topographically topics ranged from the Mediterranean, North Africa, and Europe to Western Asia, from Hellenistic times to Early Medieval times. Among the speakers were Barbara Borg (University of Exeter), David Frankfurter (University of Boston), Nicola Denzey Lewis (Brown University), Rebecca Flemming (University of Cambridge), Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis (Oxford), Angela Kim Harkins (Boston College), Ian Rutherford (University of Reading), Moulie Vidas (Princeton) as well as members from the Max-Weber-Kolleg (Emiliano Urciuoli, Katharina Rieger, Richard Gordon, Maik Patzelt, and Valentino Gasparini). They reflected in their contributions about the four main thematic fields of the conference “A ,Thing’ Called Body”, “Commemorating the Moment: Individual Modification and Appropriation of Sacrilized Spaces and Objects”, “Experiencing the Religious” und “Switching the Code: Individual Appropriation of Religious Texts”.

Whereas the panel “Experiencing the Religious” aimed at bringing to the fore experiences underlying religious action and identifying the discourses about the dangers or values of true or false religious experiences, “Switching the Code” wanted to re-consider the techniques and procedures by which meanings, discourses, and writings are performed, controlled and reproduced in religious settings and/or for theological purposes. Coming from the corner of materiality, “A ,Thing’ Called Body” emphasised the situational meaning of material artefacts in religious contexts. Likewise, the panel “Commemorating the Moment” focused on the individual appropriation and modification of (mainly public) norms in the religious field, including rituals, but particularly objects and spaces in order to disclose “micro-strategies of sacralisation”.

In a round table discussion Corinne Bonnet (Toulouse), Jan Bremmer (Groningen), Szusanna Varhelyi (Boston), and Judith Lieu (Cambridge), commented Jörg Rüpke’s recently published book “Pantheon: Geschichte der antiken Religionen (München: C.H. Beck)” under the perspective of long-term developments in religious studies of the Mediterranean. They together with the vivid discussions in all four panels highlighted the benefits as well as the prospective potential of the “lived religion”-approach, which continues by shedding light on the facette of urban space and urban religion.

The very intense, also controversial discussions are published as a volume of the journal “Religion in the Roman Empire” (round table contributions) and in two volumes published in an open access format with DeGruyter (contributions to the thematic fields of the conference).

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