

CALL FOR PAPERS

Putting Objects with Gods/Putting Gods with Objects: Divine Attributes and Materiality in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and Mythology

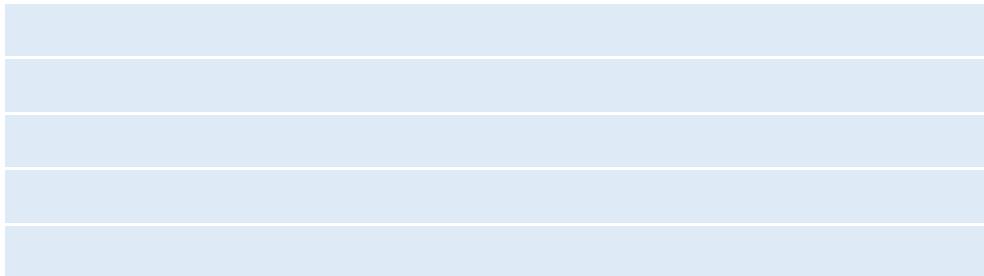
PANEL ORGANIZATION:

ORGANIZER 1:

name	Ellie Mackin Roberts
e-mail	ellie.mackinroberts@bristol.ac.uk
affiliation	University of Bristol
country	England
biography	Ellie Mackin Roberts' main research interests involve the material culture and art of ancient Greece, particularly archaic and classical Greek religion, and using theoretical frameworks related to the Material Study of Religion. She is currently working on a large-scale reinterpretation of the Athenian religious landscape using frameworks from the Material Study of Religion, Cognitive Science of Religion, and Sensory Archaeology.

ORGANIZER 2:

name	Laurialan Reitzammer
e-mail	reitzammer@colorado.edu
affiliation	University of Colorado Boulder
country	USA
biography	Laurialan Reitzammer studies Greek literature, Greek mythology and religion, and gender and sexuality. Her first book, <i>The Athenian Adonia in Context: The Adonis Festival as Cultural Practice</i> (2016) examines literary and visual representations of an ancient Greek women's festival to argue that the performance of the ritual offered a critique of mainstream cultural practices. She has recently published essays on Euripides' <i>Bacchae</i> and Sophocles' <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i> . Lauri is currently at work on her second book project on <i>théoria</i> (sacred sightseeing) and gender in Classical Athenian drama and she is co-editing (with John Gibert and Yvona Trnka-Amrhein) a volume of collected essays on the New Euripides papyrus.



PANEL SYNOPSIS:

This panel explores the multifaceted nature of divine attributes in ancient Mediterranean religions, examining their significance, functions, and representations across iconographic, textual, and archaeological sources. While scholars frequently refer to divine attributes – such as Athena's helmet, Dionysus's thyrsus, or Zeus's lightning bolt – as essential elements of 'godly' iconography, the precise nature and implications of these objects warrant deeper investigation. Our discussion aims to examine critically the terminology, conceptual frameworks, and methodological approaches surrounding divine attributes within their specific cultural contexts, with a particular focus on recent theoretical approaches to materiality in religion. Building upon the 'material turn' in religious studies, this panel interrogates the relationship between deities and their associated objects, positing that a more nuanced understanding of divine attributes can illuminate broader questions about the materiality of ancient religion, the nature of divine presence, and the complex interplay between gods and mortals. We aim to explore how these attributes not only symbolise divine powers, but also reflect societal values and cultural identities in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Key questions to be addressed include:

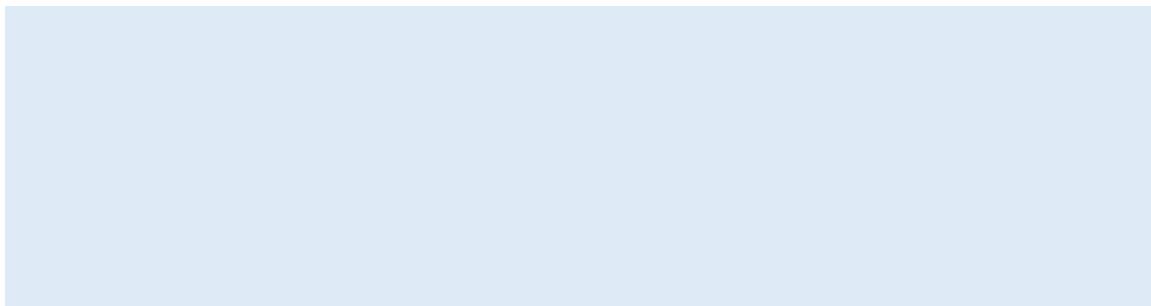
- How do we define and categorise divine attributes within the polymorphic nature of ancient Mediterranean religion?
- What roles do these objects play in religious narratives, ritual practices, and artistic representations?
- How do divine attributes mediate between the mortal and divine realms, particularly in the context of orthopraxy in ancient religious tradition?
- In what ways do these material signifiers shape perceptions of divine power and identity? How do they reflect the anthropomorphic and transcendent aspects of divinity?
- How can we apply recent theoretical approaches, such as the material turn, to better understand the active role of objects in shaping religious experiences and beliefs in the Greco-Roman world?

Our investigation will address the role of divine attributes in ritual practices, public worship, and literary texts, examining how objects like the thyrsus were integral to ecstatic rituals honouring Dionysus or how Jupiter's thunderbolt was invoked by Roman emperors to mark their own legitimacy. This exploration of ritual engagement will shed light on how these divine attributes served as conduits for interaction between the mortal and divine spheres, acting as what scholars have termed 'mediators' between worshippers and the gods. Further, we will consider the implications of divine attributes for understanding ancient conceptions of divinity itself. The anthropomorphic representations of gods through their attributes suggest a belief in an accessible and material divine realm, reflecting complex theological ideas about immanence and transcendence in ancient Mediterranean religions.

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Observations:

By examining divine attributes through these various lenses, we hope to contribute to ongoing discussions about the nature of divinity in the ancient world and the role of material culture in shaping religious experience and belief. Our collective analysis aims to shed new light on the intricate tapestry of ancient polytheism, offering fresh perspectives on the interplay between symbolism, cultural identity, and divine representation in Greek and Roman religions. The panel will draw upon a range of disciplinary perspectives, including archaeology, art history, philology, and religious studies. We aim to develop a more sophisticated framework for understanding divine attributes in ancient cultures by synthesising recent theoretical approaches with close analysis of ancient sources.

Potential topics may include:

- The role of objects in the formation and construction of divine identity, exploring the relationship between objects, identity, and agency in both cultic and mythic contexts
- The material world of the divine and its implications for understanding ancient religious practices
- The function of attributes in defining the divine and mediating between mortals and gods
- The intersection of cult and myth in the significance of divine attributes
- The connection between a god's power and their associated object, including its role as both a representative and a potential source of that power
- The relationship between mortals and divine objects, including the accessibility and use of these objects by various divine and mortal agents

We welcome papers that engage with these themes and contribute to a nuanced understanding of divine attributes in the ancient Mediterranean world. The panel aims to foster dialogue between established scholars and emerging researchers, encouraging fresh perspectives and methodological innovations in the study of ancient religion and material culture.