

Brussels Late Antique Seminar

Beyond the dominant culture: new perspectives
on religious and social practices in Late
Antiquity

Au-delà de la culture dominante : nouvelles
perspectives sur les pratiques religieuses et
sociales dans l'Antiquité tardive

17h15 : **Introduction**

Nuna TERRI (FRS-FNRS - sociAMM)
et Aude BUSINE (ULB - sociAMM)

17h30 : ***Ethical Histories of Slavery: Reframing the
Material Culture of Elite Life in Late Antiquity***

Grace STAFFORD (Vienne)

18h15 : ***New discoveries in the late antique
polytheism: The House of Kybele at Aphrodisias***

Ine JACOBS (Oxford)

Le 17 avril 2025 - 17h15 à 19h

Université libre de Bruxelles,
Campus du Solbosch,
Bâtiment K, local : K.4.401

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“Ethical Histories of Slavery: Reframing the Material Culture of Elite Life in Late Antiquity”**Dr. Grace Stafford****Postdoctoral Assistant in Late Antique and Early Christian Archaeology, University of Vienna**

It is often lamented that enslaved people are almost invisible in ancient sources and are particularly difficult to find in archaeology. Many excellent recent publications have searched for evidence of enslavement such as shackles, restraints, slave prisons, slave markets, and slave-quarters in elite homes. All acknowledge the difficulty of identifying objects or spaces that were specifically assigned to, ‘owned’ by, or primarily used by enslaved people. This is important and groundbreaking research, but it often yields limited results owing to the dominance of the wealthy and powerful over our surviving source material. In this paper, I propose another way to advance the study of slavery and particularly the material culture of slavery. I suggest we need to change what we consider to be material evidence of slavery to include what we currently know as ‘elite’ material culture. The late antique Mediterranean was a slave-owning society and the lives of the elite were fundamentally dependent on the labour of enslaved bodies. By extension, the rich visual and material culture of elite homes, which forms the bedrock for much discussion of life in this period, was not possible without slavery. In this paper, I argue that we can resituate and reanalyse much elite domestic material culture as the material culture of slavery. I draw on pioneering work by scholars working on early modern slavery in the Americas who seek to write more ethical histories of slavery, in order to ask how we can pursue a more ethical archaeology of slavery in Late Antiquity. Through a series of case studies, I show how re-reading our sources and centring the perspectives of enslaved people and their labour rather than the status and self-presentation of elite enslavers can offer a fruitful avenue for research.

“New discoveries in the late antique polytheism: The House of Kybele at Aphrodisias”**Dr. Ine Jacobs****Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Associate Professor of Byzantine Archaeology and Visual Culture, University of Oxford**

In 1986, excavations at Aphrodisias uncovered two late antique statuettes—one of Kybele and the other of Asklepios—in what appeared to be an early 7th-century residential area, slightly removed from the city center. Following a pause in research after 1986, investigations in this area have recently resumed. In 2024, new excavations revealed an underground cult complex dedicated to the Anatolian mother goddess Kybele, which flourished during Late Antiquity and persisted into the early 7th century, until the structure housing it was abruptly destroyed. This lecture will examine the architectural setting of the cult complex, the cult statuettes and associated material culture, as well as the context that allowed such a cult to endure.