

SECRECY AND SALVATION

IN LATE ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, AND RELIGIONS

Interdisciplinary Symposium

Monday, 9 September, 9:45 – 18 h

Freie Universität Berlin

Fabeckstr. 23–25, 14195 Berlin

"Holzlaube" Room 0.1063

09
SEP 2024



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 BERLIN GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF
ANCIENT STUDIES

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 FREIE
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Interdisciplinary Symposium

Secrecy and Salvation

in Late Ancient Philosophy, Science, and Religion

Secrecy and salvation were at the heart of most philosophical schools and religions of late antiquity. The interplay between these two categories was based on the idea that salvific knowledge was conveyed from master to disciple, or through revelation from God to a select few, either directly or by means of ritual initiation. Such a view of hidden knowledge was widespread among Platonists, Gnostics, Christians, and mystery cults alike, and had ritual, literary, and sociological ramifications.

Regarding the content of the ritual practices of initiation, we have little information, as the surviving evidence is scant. However, references to secrecy and salvation are rich in existing textual traditions and allow for detailed examination. In these texts, we find a special kind of technical language, encompassing terms such as “mystery,” “esoteric,” and “secret,” which have merged with soteriological discourses featured in “revealed” writings.

Considering the nature of such a context, the following questions emerge: Why was salvation kept secret and not shared equally among everyone? By whom was it kept secret, and for what reasons? Did secrecy lead to different types of salvation which were assigned to different groups of people? Was the intertwining of secrecy and salvation used to establish a hierarchical power structure based on the authority of a select few? How does the motif of secrecy align with the need to spread teachings concerning salvation to a wider audience?

The workshop to be held on 9 September at the Freie Universität seeks to explore these questions by examining the making and transmission of salvific knowledge in various strands of thought, such as philosophy (Platonism), sciences (Alchemy), and religions (Gnosticism/Christianity), and the ramifications these have had in the social and intellectual contexts where these traditions emerged.

The talks given during the workshop will enhance our understanding of how secrecy and salvation functioned as rhetorical and literary codes, fueling polemical narratives and shaping self-representation among various religious milieus and knowledge groups.

Time & Venue

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"Holzlaube", Room 0.1063

Organizer

Eugen Stafie (Freie Universität Berlin, BerGSAS)

Participants

Andrea Annese (Università di Bologna, History of Christianity)

Marco Bellini (Università di Bologna, Philosophy of science)

Costanza Bianchi (Bologna, Fondazione per le scienze religiose, Religious studies)

Johanna Brankaer (Universität Würzburg, Catholic Theological Faculty)

Tonio Sebastian Richter (Freie Universität Berlin, Coptology)

Emrys Schlatter (Freie Universität Berlin, History of religion)

Konrad Schwarz (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Theology)

Vittorio Secco (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Theology)

Eugen Stafie (Freie Universität Berlin, Philosophy)



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