



Universiteit
Leiden

Modern Perceptions of Ancient Religions

Applicants

Eligible proposals must have at least two applicants from Humanities, preferably with an interdisciplinary approach.

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Kim Beerden	Ancient History/Ancient Religions
Markus Altena Davidsen	Sociology of Religion

Project description

Two contrasting views of the Graeco-Roman world have become ever more pronounced in popular culture. Right wing movements (both in the US, UK and The Netherlands) see antiquity as a white and patriarchal 'cradle of civilization'. At the same time, antiquity is depicted as multiracial (BBC, *Troy: Fall of a City*, 2018) and from a female perspective (Pat Barker, *Silence of the Girls*, 2018).

In the context of reception studies academics can discuss what these perceptions reveal about the needs of our own society: what kind of narrative about history do we create, and for which reasons? This project analyzes recent Dutch popular receptions of ancient religions. Religions are crucial in popular understanding of antiquity: in modern monotheistic, atheistic or agnostic eyes, ancient polytheism is a phenomenon that lends itself to project 'otherness' on the ancient world, but can also serve as a source of long-forgotten wisdom, and so on. This project focuses on the period 1998-2018: which shifts in Dutch perceptions of ancient religions do we see between the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century? And why? What does this say about modern needs reflected in perceptions of ancient religions?

The aim of this Research Traineeship will be to analyze the underexplored reception of ancient religions in popular culture, taking Dutch spiritual magazines as a case study. There are five such magazines: *Paravisie* (1986-), *Paraview* (1997-), *Happinez* (2003-), *Bres* (1965-), and *Prana/Mantra* (1975-). A pilot study by Beerden has shown that there are many references to antiquity (and in particular to ancient religions) in these magazines. Focus on the period 1998-2018 ensures the project is manageable, relevant, and retains the time depth necessary to discern trends and developments.

Research Trainee Profile

This project will employ two research trainees, both bringing their own expertise which they will be expected to share. Students enrolled in the following programmes will be eligible to apply: BA Religiewetenschappen (3rd year only), MA Religious Studies, BA History (3rd year only), MA/ResMA History, and MA/ResMA Classics and Ancient Civilizations.

Research Trainee 1 (Greece and Rome) will be required to have knowledge of, or interest in, ancient Graeco-Roman religion (e.g., took the course 'Geloof aan de goden' and/or worked on a topic related to religion for the BA thesis) and popular culture. Prior interest in interdisciplinary/comparative research/study is preferred, but no prerequisite.

Research Trainee 2 (Contemporary, alternative religion) will be required to have a good knowledge of new religions and alternative spirituality (e.g., in addition to the mandatory courses 'New Religions' and 'Sociology of Religion' took also 'Fiction, parody and play in new religions' and/or worked on a topic related to new religions or religion and popular culture for the BA thesis). Prior interest in interdisciplinary/comparative research/study is preferred, but no prerequisite.

Both research trainees need to be strong in planning, collaboration, discussion and should feel comfortable in working together as a team.

The research trainees will have the following tasks (under supervision):

- 1) To familiarize themselves with the basic concepts of religions of antiquity with the aim of identifying references to ancient religions in the modern corpus of sources.
- 2) To identify and become familiar with relevant research into popular reception of ancient religions.
- 3) To identify and become familiar with the corpus of sources (*Paravisie*, *Paraview*, *Happinez*, *Bres*, and *Prana*) available in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek.
- 4) To distinguish useful concepts which enable us (as a team) to create an analytical matrix by which we can perform a content analysis.
- 5) Work together to provide a thorough chronological analysis in the context of the debate on the reception of ancient religions in modern times.

Collaboration

The project benefits collaboration between the department of Ancient History and LUCSoR: we hope that this small collaboration will lead to a closer understanding of our fields and may result in more communal research projects, for example an application for a communal NWA project. Such an interdisciplinary grant application would benefit both departments. The organization of a conference where neo-paganism (in the widest sense of the word) takes centre stage would be another option.

In terms of teaching there is certainly the option of organizing an MA course on receptions of antiquity in modern religions, in which students from both departments could participate. If the Research Trainees are still at Leiden by that time they could present their work at the conference and/or during the course. Also, the MA Programme Religious Studies will start to incorporate a 10 EC internal research internship inspired on the Research Trainee Programme in 2019-2020. Markus Altena Davidsen will coordinate the internships and participation in the Research Trainee Programme would enable him to gain more experience.

In the long term we see this small research project as a way to facilitate contacts between the two departments and even the development of a research network. We hope that more ideas for joined teaching, research projects and grant proposals will arise from this increased contact between scholars of religion in LUCSoR and Ancient History.

Deliverables

Presentations: the students will both present their work at the Ancient History Research Seminar at Leiden; present their work, as a presentation or poster, at a suitable national venue such as the annual Tri-university Symposium (organized by the sections for the Study of Religion in Leiden, Amsterdam and Utrecht). The latter meeting will take place at Leiden and is organized by Altena Davidsen. As mentioned above there is the option of a later presentation at a communal conference.

Blogs: the trainees will be asked to write a blog about reception studies to be submitted to overdemuur.org. This well-read blog by and for historians is a suitable outlet. They will gain skills and knowledge related to valorization.

Papers: the trainees and Beerden will write an article for the journal *Narthex*. This is a journal aimed at teachers of Godsdienst/Levensbeschouwing in The Netherlands. It is well read and makes for an excellent first publication for the trainees, to appear in 2019. As a next step, and in the longer term, the results of this project can also be used to write a collaborative article for the A-journal *Numen: international review for the history of religions*.

Planning

The trainees will **receive continuous supervision** by Beerden and Altena Davidsen through **bi-weekly meetings**. For stages of the project see:

What	When	Who
Familiarization with ancient religion, reception studies, and contemporary, alternative religion through reading and discussion	February	Trainees, KB and MAD
Study of sources and building analytical matrix	March-May	Trainees
Blog on first findings	April-May	Trainees
Presentation work in progress at Ancient History Seminar and Tri-university seminar	May/June	Trainees
Analysis and article <i>Narthex</i>	June-August	Trainees, KB

Student Application

Students send the following items (a, b and c) to k.beerden@hum.leidenuniv.nl. A short interview may be part of the application process.

- (a) a resume (to demonstrate their academic credentials),
- (b) a short motivation letter (1 A4) (in which students are encouraged to elaborate not only on why they are the right ones for the job, but also to reflect on what they hope to gain/learn from the project),
- (c) and a research note (1 A4) (in which students present some initial ideas about how to approach the task at hand).