

## Call for Papers for Conference

# Emotions in Antiquity

## 2.10–3.10.2026 in Bern, Switzerland

The so-called 'Emotional Turn' has profoundly reshaped research across the humanities and cultural studies over recent decades. Emotions, affects, and cognitive states are no longer understood merely as private inner states but as culturally shaped, discursively mediated, and historically variable phenomena. For the disciplines concerned with Antiquity, this development poses particular challenges: how can emotional concepts be recovered from ancient sources – textual and material alike – without risking anachronistic projections of modern emotional categories onto the past?

The conference 'Emotions in Antiquity' takes this methodological question as its starting point. Central to our inquiry is a critical reflection on the applicability of the concept of emotion and related categories (affect, cognition, feeling) to ancient sources. Key questions include: In what ways are emotions legible in ancient sources – in texts, images, and material remains? How can emotional content be accessed in languages that do not contain emotion as a distinct category in their vocabulary, such as Biblical Hebrew, or in visual and archaeological evidence without words? What epistemic horizons does emotion-sensitive reading open for understanding subtexts, implicit attitudes, and cultural self-understandings in ancient societies? Where lie the limits of the Emotional Turn – and what conceptual alternatives or supplements might be available?

The conference, hosted by the institute of Jewish Studies, is conceived as a forum for genuine interdisciplinary exchange within the broader field of ancient studies. We invite contributions from Archaeology, Ancient History, Classical Philology (Greek and Latin studies), Jewish Studies, Biblical Studies, and related disciplines. All contributions share a focus on emotions, affects, or emotional concepts in ancient cultures – from the Hebrew Bible to the Graeco-Roman world.

A particular concern of the conference is to bring together early-career researchers and established scholars in substantive dialogue: doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers are explicitly encouraged to apply alongside senior academics. The conference will be structured into thematic sections organised according to research field and period.

**Submitted papers should combine two dimensions:**

- A theoretical-methodological reflection: how is the concept of emotion, affect, or cognition understood and employed within the relevant disciplinary context? What are the advantages and limitations of this framework for the contributor's own research?
- A concrete research example from the contributor's own project: how does the theoretical approach hold up when applied to a specific body of ancient material – a text, a visual source, an archaeological assemblage, or similar?

Contributions that adopt a meta-perspective are especially welcome: papers that reflect on what their own research contributes to the broader question of the epistemic value of emotion-focused approaches in ancient studies. Research addressing emotions such as compassion and empathy is already represented among confirmed participants and offers rich points of connection for wider dialogue.

**Venue:** University of Bern, Institute of Jewish Studies

**Languages:** English

**Paper length:** approx. 30 minutes (+ additional 15 min for discussion)

**Costs:** Accommodation and travel expenses will be covered by the organisers

**Submission deadline:** Please submit an abstract including theoretical framework, meta-reflection on the epistemic value of the emotion-focused approach of 300 to 500 words and a brief academic CV until **May 22, 2026** to [ilija.baumann@unibe.ch](mailto:ilija.baumann@unibe.ch)

**Early-career researchers are warmly encouraged to apply.**

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