

LATE ANTIQUITY SEMINAR (LAS)

Faculty of Theology, University of Bern

SNSF Consolidator Projects “Religious Interaction and Co-Production” & “RomAge”

This year, the two SNSF Consolidator projects based at the Faculty of Theology are launching a new joint initiative: the **Late Antiquity Seminar (LAS)**.

The research teams of

- “Religious Interaction and Co-production: Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Entangled Early Medieval West” (PI Katharina Heyden)
- “RomAge: Ageing and Old Age in the 4th–6th-Century Roman Empire” (PI Anna Usacheva)

will host open sessions in which we share work in progress within our teams and, more broadly, with all interested MA students, PhD candidates, early-career and established researchers.

The seminar explicitly opens its platform to all colleagues who would like to present their ongoing research and are interested in filling one of the open presentation slots.

The aim is to create a welcoming, interdisciplinary forum where scholars from different backgrounds can present and discuss current research related (broadly) to Late Antiquity, as well as to adjacent ancient and medieval topics.

The seminar will run in a hybrid format: meetings will be held on site, with the option to join online via Zoom.

Unless otherwise announced, meetings take place in Room A103 (Unitobler).

LAS – SCHEDULE 2026

22 September 2026, 14:00–16:00

Late Antiquity Seminar

Speaker: Dr Gaetano Spampinato (Religious Interaction and Co-Production)

Title: to be announced

12 October 2026, 10:00–12:00

Shared LAS / RomAge Seminar

Speaker: Prof. Elisa Uusimäki (Aarhus University, Denmark)

Title: “Writing Intersectional Travel History in Light of Early Jewish Writings

Abstract:

This presentation examines the recent rise of travel as a field of historical inquiry and critically evaluates widespread assumptions about travel as a gendered practice. Focusing on a neglected dimension of travel history—the motives, implementation, and outcomes of women’s mobility in early Jewish corpora from the Bible to Bar Kokhba—it challenges the notion that women were largely immobile in antiquity. Methodologically, it distinguishes between documentary sources, which point to plausible forms of women’s movement, and literary texts, which preserve cultural imaginaries of travel. It further argues that an intersectional approach to these sources highlights the complexity of travel and its potentially far-reaching consequences for women’s lives and social positioning.

Prof. Uusimäki will share with us the results of her ERC project and the second hour of the seminar will be devoted to a broader discussion of studies on mobility and gender, as well as methodological challenges in researching slavery and other underrepresented groups.

30 October 2026, 14:00–16:00

Late Antiquity Seminar

Speaker: Dr Florian Graz (RomAge)

Title: “Echoes of the Past. Stories of Transmission and Discovery in Ancient Egyptian Literature and the Origins of Pseudo-Documentarism in Antiquity”

Abstract:

The term pseudo-documentarism refers to intratextual claims that a real-world text (or at least significant portions of it) derives from a fictional original, the “pseudo-document.” The real-world text is thus framed as a mere reproduction of the latter. In its most basic function, pseudo-documentarism authenticates a real-world text by attributing it to a supposedly more authentic source, dissociated from the text’s actual contexts and purportedly authored by someone other than the actual historical author, in entirely different contexts of time and space. Typically, pseudo-documents are contextualised through often quite elaborate framing stories that explain their transmission and discovery, thereby lending credibility to the supposed source. Pseudo-documentarism appears to have been a particularly prevalent narrative strategy in the literature of the Early Imperial Period and Late Antiquity. We find it employed – in a very similar manner – in the Greco-Roman novels, in Christian apocrypha and hagiography, as well as in various Hermetic texts. Already Wolfgang Speyer, in his authoritative study of pseudo-documentary tropes in Greco-Roman Antiquity, had suggested that the device might not only have been particularly prominent in Egypt, but rather have originated there, with roots in Ancient Egyptian literature and book culture. This presentation reassesses Speyer’s hypothesis by surveying the occurrence of pseudo-documentarism in the non-narrative and narrative literature of Ancient Egypt (an undertaking outside of Speyer’s scope) and by comparing its

form and function with the later Greco-Roman and Coptic works – thus charting a new aspect of the interplay between Ancient Egyptian, Greco-Roman, and early Christian literature.

17 November 2026, 14:00–16:00

Late Antiquity Seminar

Open slot – we welcome volunteers for this date (!).

2–4 December 2026

Conference organised by RomAge and the Department of Roman Law:

“Social Norms, Regulations, and Biopolitics in the 3rd–6th-Century Roman Empire”

(For the detailed programme, please see the separate flyer or the RomAge webpage on the UniBE site.)

CONTACT & PROPOSALS

For inquiries and presentation proposals, please contact:

Prof. Anna Usacheva, Faculty of Theology, University of Bern (anna.usacheva@unibe.ch)