



SEMINAR

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damnationes et transformationes memoriae – Religious memory sanctions in Roman Asia Minor

Irene Selsvold, PhD candidate

My Ph.D. project aims to shed light on the processes that lead to the decisions made in Late Antiquity to destroy, transform or preserve pagan art and architecture in the transition between paganism and Christianity in the Roman Empire. I focus on the methods used to show Christian presence in the cities of Asia Minor in relation to pagan material culture, from destruction of temples to more subtle signs like cross-markings and graffiti to create a more complete picture of how pagan sacred spaces was used in the building of a Christian culture. I use theoretical perspectives on the role of material culture in shaping cultural memory, and the social agency of material culture to approach my material.

My research material is found in western Asia Minor, focused mainly on Ephesus in the coastal area, and the inland cities Aphrodisias, Sardis and Hierapolis, further east in the river valleys of the small and large Meander. These cities had vivid and important pagan cults in Roman times, and remained important also after the Christianization of the empire. All have rich evidence for Christian presence in former pagan contexts. I also include material from smaller sites in the area, including Tripolis and Laodikeia.

My project will contribute to our understanding of the process of Christianization of the Roman Empire by shedding light on the Christian use and perception of the pagan past in the building of a Christian cultural memory. Research on the use of history in the present is a trending perspective in historic disciplines, and I believe research on use of history in the past is going to be a large trend in the years to come. It is also important in the sense that it explores how people perceive and act against material remains during and after conflicts, a situation that is highly valid in the present, given all the political and religious conflicts we see today. I argue that the phenomenon I describe is a universal one – destroying, altering and reusing material culture in conflict situations. The most current example is the attacks of ISIS on Roman monuments in Palmyra.

