

Call for Papers

The Concept of Freedom in Ancient Greece and Rome

16th Celtic Conference in Classics in Coimbra (15 – 18 July 2025)

Organizers: Professor Melina Tamiolaki (University of Crete) and PD Dr Lothar Willms (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)

Freedom is a core concept of the Western world; it is crucial to political discourse and theory and fundamental in social and philosophical debates. The idea of freedom arose in ancient Greece and progressively unfolded. Research on freedom has mainly focused on the following issues: on the vocabulary of ἐλευθερία (freedom) and related terms, such as αὐτονομία (autonomy) (Krüger-Mohamad-Klotzbach-Pfeilschifter 2022) and παρρησία (freedom of speech) (Sluiter-Rosen 2017), on the initial conceptualization of the notion (Raaflaub 2004, Patterson 1991), on its meaning and nuances (ideological or rhetorical) in specific authors (Binayemotlagh 2002, Galloway 2004, Eliasson 2008, Edwards 2009, Tamiolaki 2010), on its political or philosophical dimension (Muller 1997, Bobzien 1998, Willms 2011), on its relation to other concepts of relevant or contrary meaning, such as individual rights, equality, democracy, tyranny and unfreedom (Liddel 2007, Anagnostopoulos-Santas 2013, Vlassopoulos 2021, Tamiolaki 2024).

Despite the plethora of studies in freedom, there is still scope for deepening our understanding of this notion, by systematically examining more terms and related expressions (e.g. ἐλευθεριότης, προαίρεσις, τὸ εφ' ἡμῶν), by promoting interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches, and by studying more closely the association (or possible equivalence) between ancient and modern concepts of freedom (e.g. ancient terms related to the freedom of will, sexual or religious freedom, moral freedom, freedom of choice etc.).

The aim of this panel is twofold:

- a) first, to offer a forum for a methodological and terminological clarification of this notion, by examining underexplored authors and genres (such as the novel, the New Testament, theology, inscriptions, papyri etc. esp. philosophical) that might contain thus far undiscovered concepts of freedom;
- b) to prompt a comparative reflection on freedom by focusing on two ancient civilizations, ancient Greece and Rome.

More specifically, papers in this panel will investigate the concept of freedom in politics, jurisprudence, historiography, literature, philosophy, and theology with a chronological range from the Mycenaean Bronze Age to Late Antiquity, addressing (one or more of) the following questions:

- What are the terms used to refer to freedom in ancient Greece and/or Rome and what is their meaning? Is this notion implicit, made explicit (e.g. by a definition) or even debated (e.g. in the philosophical treatises on freedom and slavery)?
- Which terms/concepts are correlated with freedom in ancient Greek and Latin literature and culture (e.g. *παρρησία*, *ἐλευθεριότης*, *αὐτονομία*, *libertas*, *liberalitas*, *licentia*, *dignitas*, *honor*, *virtus*) and what are their different nuances?
- To what extent does genre (poetry/prose) affect the conceptualization of freedom and its literary representation in ancient Greece and/or Rome?
- Can we trace an evolution of this concept from ancient Greece to Rome? And how is this evolution situated in the history of ideas?
- To what degree concepts of freedom in ancient Greece and/or Rome influence or enrich our modern understanding of the concept?
- Digital representation of the concept of freedom (e.g. through tools that bring to light its proximity/association with other concepts etc.)

We expect that this panel will significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of the notion of freedom in Greco-Roman antiquity and to a re-evaluation of its potential relevance for our modern world.

Abstracts in English of no more than 300 words should be sent to both organizers (lothar.willms@hu-berlin.de, tamiolaki@uoc.gr) in both pdf and word no later than 20 February 2025. Notifications about acceptance will be sent after 5 March 2025. Please note that travel and accommodation expenses will not be reimbursed, and that the conference is an in-person event. We plan to publish the contributions in an edited volume.

Confirmed speakers are:

Sven Günther, Professor, Northeast Normal University, Changchun

Naomi Campa, Assistant Professor, University of Texas at Austin

Demetra Kassimis, Assistant Prof. Cambridge

Hartmut Leppin, Professor, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt

Christoph Lundgreen, Professor, Technische Universität Dresden

Orlando Patterson, John Cowles Professor of Sociology, Harvard University

Klaus Vieweg, Professor, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

Kostas Vlassopoulos, Professor, University of Crete

Shane Wallace, Assistant Professor, University of Dublin

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