

# DIVINATION AND AUTHORITY IN GRAECO- ROMAN ANTIQUITY

**OCTOBER 22 – 24, 2025**

WIS Bildungsforum Potsdam | Am Kanal 47 | 14467 Potsdam

The study of ancient divination has increasingly become a focus of research over the past few decades, with both institutionalized and individual ('lived') practices attracting scholarly interest. However, it is only in recent years that one fundamental aspect concerning the significance of divination has begun to receive attention: the nature, meaning, and role of authority.

In the view of contemporaries, ancient divination was a form of communication with the divine sphere. It allowed individuals, regardless of their social status, to ascertain the opinion of the supernatural regarding a given situation and, in turn, to communicate this information. As such, divination played a crucial role in Greek and Roman societies, shaping both private life and political affairs. Despite its centrality, divination was neither a fixed and coherent nor a universally valid or universally accepted system but rather a contested space where various specialists and techniques competed for legitimacy. At the heart of this competition was the issue of authority—how it was constructed, recognized, and maintained. While previous scholarship has explored specific divinatory practices and their political uses, the broader relationship between divination and authority remains insufficiently examined. This conference, therefore, seeks to explore both the authority of divination (how divination as a system gained credibility) and the authority in divination (how individual diviners established and maintained their status).

In what ways was the authority of the supernatural conveyed through divinatory practices used in different contexts of the Greek and Roman world? How did ancient societies negotiate which individuals could claim divinatory authority? How did divination reinforce the authority of the powerful? How did divination empower marginalized individuals? What role did divinatory rituals, objects, and performances play in asserting authority? What theoretical concepts and methodological approaches enable a better understanding of historical developments related to these questions? By addressing these and similar issues, this conference will contribute to broader discussions on religious expertise, materiality, and ancient Mediterranean belief systems, and ultimately place the still-young study of the significance of authority in the field of divination on a new foundation.



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If you would like to attend the conference, either in person or online, please send an email to:  
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