



# MONDAY LECTURES | WISE 2024/25

## IN RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES

RESEARCH BUILDING "WELTBEZIEHUNGEN" | C19.00.02/03 | 16:15 - 17:45

### LECTURE SERIES BY FRANCESCO MASSA

## BEYOND LAST PAGANS: ROMAN POLYTHEISM RESHAPING IN LATE ANTIQUITY

**25.11.2024 | PART II**

### MULTIPLE INITIATIONS FOR THE LATE ANTIQUE ELITE: POLYTHEISTIC DYNAMISM OR PAGAN CRISIS?

The second lecture will analyze the question of multiple initiations into mystery cults among aristocrats in the Roman world in the second half of the fourth century. Both in Libanius's orations (e.g., Oration 15 To Julian on Behalf of Aristophanes of Corinth) and in inscriptions from the second half of the fourth century (e.g., Vettius Agorius Praetextatus in Rome or Mousonius in Attic), multiple initiations appear as a mark of prestige within the *cursus honorum*. Albeit in a rhetorical construction aimed at condemnation, Christian authors also testify to the social status linked to the initiations, as in the case of the Confession of Cyprian the Magician.

The accumulation of religious responsibilities has hitherto been interpreted either as a consequence of the decadence of the polytheistic religion, due to the dwindling number of people willing to take on traditional religious functions; or as a sign of the new vitality of polytheism, supported first by the emperor Julian and then by the usurper Eugenius. We will examine the relevance of these interpretations in the light of changes in polytheistic ritual practices in the second half of the fourth century.

**ALL GUESTS WELCOME.  
NO REGISTRATION NECESSARY.**