

CALL FOR PAPERS

Beyond Scare Quotes: Rethinking Words and Things in the Study of Ancient “Judaism” and “Christianity”

*Regional Graduate Student Conference, to be held at the University of Pennsylvania, April 2011
In conjunction with the 48th Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins*

Scare quotes are everywhere in the study of “Judaism” and “Christianity” in antiquity. The ideological import of these terms – along with other words previously thought neutral and descriptive, such as “orthodoxy” and “heresy” – has been exposed. We as scholars can no longer blithely assume a direct correspondence between the categories our sources use and social reality; the words themselves shape reality. Although this insight is not new, it has recently come to dominate discussion in the field, concurrent with the newfound interest in the construction of “Judaism” and “Christianity” as distinct, mutually exclusive “religions.” Arguably, however, the time has come to theorize beyond scare quotes. If the words we use do not correspond simply or directly to things, what actually are the objects of study for students of ancient “Judaism” and “Christianity?” Could the appellations “Judaism” and “Christianity” most helpfully be thought of as referring to specific discourses? As ideologies? And what exactly would either of those options mean? Would more attention to group theory help? Identity theory? Could a re-thinking of the relationship between words and things help to re-theorize the relationship between belief and practice?

These questions will form the focus for a **regional graduate student conference** at the University of Pennsylvania, sponsored by Penn’s Department of Religious Studies and Center for Ancient Studies. This one-day event will feature **Daniel Boyarin** as a keynote speaker and is tentatively scheduled for April 11, 2011. It will serve as the culminating event of the 48th Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, which will explore the same theme through monthly meetings and discussions during the 2010-2011 academic year; confirmed speakers for the PSCO include **Dale Martin** (September 23, 2010), **Seth Schwartz** (October 21, 2010), **Ra’anan S. Boustan** (November 17, 2010), **Ross Kraemer** (January 20, 2011), **Virginia Burrus** (February 17, 2011), and **Elizabeth Castelli** (March 31, 2011).

For the graduate student conference, we invite proposals for papers that use specific texts, authors, locales, and test-cases to explore the heuristic limits of our current models, or otherwise experiment with strategies and solutions for rethinking basic questions in the field in light of particular bodies of ancient evidence and/or contemporary theory from across disciplines. Abstract consideration of these questions is not our primary desideratum; papers that address the pertinent issues in the context of current research projects are welcome. Proposals should be between 500 and 800 words, and include a title, description of the specific materials studied and general method, and a statement of the thesis. We especially encourage proposals from graduate students in the region, who would be able to attend most or all of the sessions of the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins during the academic year. Consideration of proposals will begin on **September 15, 2010**, but proposals will be accepted on a rolling basis thereafter until all slots are filled. Those interested in applying to participate are encouraged to submit a letter of interest as soon as possible to the conference organizers, **Philip Fackler** (pfackler@sas.upenn.edu) and **Phillip Webster** (pwebster@sas.upenn.edu).

See <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/psco/> or further details, or email Annette Yoshiko Reed (reedanne@sas.upenn.edu)