

SECRECY SEMINAR

Abstracts

6 September 2013

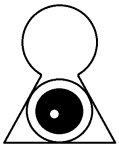
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Nick Marshall (Study of Religion)

Secrecy in Ancient Greek Philosophy

The adjective “Esoteric” first appears in Aristotle to describe division within the Pythagorean school between insiders and outsiders of the philosophical school, public audiences and an inner circle of people, supposedly given clearer access to philosophical traditions. This presentation will explore and review the evidence for the notion of an esoteric Plato (the Tübingen school of Platonic interpretation), as well as evidence throughout the history of philosophy including later Neoplatonism (Plotinus and Iamblichus) which evinces a shared strategy of secrecy. Specific interest will be paid to the relationship between two spatial-temporal locations for the functioning of secrecy: the Platonic school and the tradition in the later commentators. I argue that the traditions of secrecy, which were more about the preservation of trade secrets and should therefore be recognized as a feature of the antagonistic social-cultural milieu of ancient Greek intellectuals, became for the later commentators a means of importing their own ideas into the classical philosophers, thereby enhancing prestige for their own novel ideas, providing a means for Platonic-Aristotelian harmonization, and opening the route for later Christian Lutheran apologists and esotericists alike to impose on various philosophical traditions equivalence in doctrines with mysteries and magic.



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Trine Arlund Hass (Classical Philology)

Clarity and obscurity in bucolic poetry

In bucolic poetry secrecy is a convention: The exegetic tradition found Vergil hiding behind the shepherd Tityrus in his first *Eclogue* and interpreted the poems of the collection as statements about contemporary politics and persons. This conception of Vergil's *Eclogues* as allegorical texts was probably a main reason why the bucolic genre became immensely popular in the Renaissance. Allegory combined with the simplicity of the pastoral environment made the poems ideal as microcosmic representations of the world. The bucolic secrecy extends to another genre characteristic, namely the explicit awareness of genre tradition expressed through literary allusions. It is part of the genre convention that the poet attempts to establish his own place in the literary tradition, but as with the allegoric themes it varies how secretly or openly the literary role models are invoked.

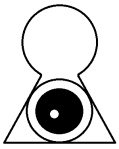
The play on secrecy can be seen in the light of the Aristotelian concept *anagnorisis*: the joy of reading bucolic poetry is connected to the reader's identification of hidden themes or persons and the recognition of learned literary references—in short, to the revealing of secrets. Each bucolic poem can similarly be seen as an attempt to find the perfect balance between obscurity and clarity for the particular theme and audience.

This paper will examine the balance between clarity and obscurity in the use of literary and (particularly) Vergilian allusions in two Danish works of bucolic poetry: *Bucolica* (Wittenberg 1560) by Erasmus Lætus, and *Daphnis* (Copenhagen 1563) by Hans Philipsen Pratensis.

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Søren Søndergaard Jensen (Study of Religion)

Why God has secrets – concealment and revelation in early Christian-Muslim encounters

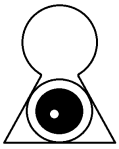
In Late Antiquity, the nature and status of God's knowledge was a widely discussed topic within and across the monotheistic traditions of Judaism and Christianity. What did God's knowledge consist of and could it be grasped by man? What would remain concealed and what would be revealed? And how would it be revealed? Such questions became even more accentuated with the emergence of the Qur'ān – God's revealed word to man – and the Islamic tradition.

In this paper, I aim at analyzing the tension between revelation and concealment as *topos* in early Christian-Muslim encounters, where focus will be on early Christian Arabic apologetic writings. In form and content, these writings differ substantially from earlier Christian apologetics, which, by scholars, has been taken to reflect a process where Christians adapted to a new (Islamic) context. By defending Christianity in ways that were perceived sound in Islamic circles, Christian Arabic authors aimed at proving the credibility of their religion to Christians and Muslims alike. It will be argued that the question of revelation versus concealment of God's knowledge plays a prominent role in early Christian Arabic apologetic writings, indicating that this question was a focal point in Christian-Muslim encounters in the early Islamic period.

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Troels Myrup Kristensen (Classical Archaeology)

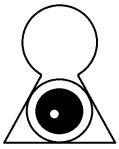
Secrecy and Revelation in Sacred Travel: Staging Movement from Classical Greece to Late Antiquity

This paper that forms part of a larger research project on sacred travel and movement in the ancient world will investigate the role of vision in the experience of pilgrimage sites in the eastern Mediterranean. In particular, it will explore how the pilgrims' experiences of as well as their movement to and within such sites were staged by different visual strategies, especially through the lens of the two concepts of secrecy (*i.e.* keeping things hidden from sight) and revelation. I will argue that this approach is essential to understand the spatial layout of sanctuaries that sought to attract visitors from larger regions of the Mediterranean.

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Maria Louise Munkholt Christensen (Systematic Theology)
“The Lord has bidden us to pray in secret”

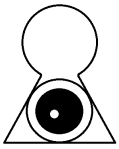
This paper will focus on what appears to be a contradiction in the three third-century treatises on prayer written by the Christian authors Tertullian, Cyprian and Origen. In each of these texts, Christians are at the same time admonished to pray in secret (in accordance with the New Testament teachings, Mt 6:6) and to pray together. Origen, for instance, on the one hand, notes: “You, when you pray, go to your room and close the door.” (De Or. 19.1). However, on the other hand, he insists: “That it is preferable to pray in that place where saintly persons meet, gathering reverently together as a congregation.” (31,7).

The aim of the paper is twofold: Firstly, it sets out to shed light on how the relation between private/secret prayer and public prayer was presented in the third century among Christians, and secondly, it sets out to investigate the function of prayer as something that might have had the ability to bridge the private and the public domains. By employing the modern term “identity” as an analytical tool, the social and historical implications of the combination of private and public prayer will be investigated.

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Lærke Maria Andersen Funder (Classical Archaeology)

Secrecy in museums—revealing other people’s secrets

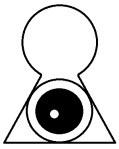
For this seminar, I have tried to look at museums through the lens of secrecy. I will explore how this concept relates to the museum institution, and how it can help us to think about the museum and how we display objects. I shall try to discuss the consequences of both keeping secrets and revealing them.

Before I commence on the journey into the secrets of the museum, I will, however, explore the meaning of a “secret” as it has been discussed and defined in sociology. The word “secret” may drag along connotations such as something clandestine, taboo, lies, something hidden, private or unknown – but things may be all these things and still not be a secret. Sociologist George Simmel, in a seminal article from 1906, explored the social meaning of secrets and proposed some diagnostic traits of the concept that have stayed valid and still is applied by researchers to day – this may imply that we may need to rethink them.

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Jane Hjarl Petersen (Classical Archaeology)

Secrecy and privacy in tomb architecture: The Via Laurentina necropolis as a case study

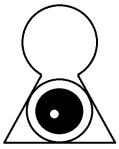
The spatial layout of Roman tombs and their architectural schemes have attracted much scholarly attention during several decades and have been approached from an array of angles over the years; from studies of architectural elements and their mathematical interrelations to building techniques and materials, to their social and political implications. A general theme within the majority of these studies has been the focus on visibility and communication to the wider public which Roman tombs is believed to have possessed as their main goal apart from providing a final resting place for deceased members of society.

Through this extrovert communication a number of social, political and economic factors could be conveyed to the passersby and thus secure the owners of the tombs and their family or associates immediate attention as well as the much sought everlasting commemoration. However, the focus on outward displays seems to have been fluctuating over time, and perhaps space, and more introvert architectural designs enjoyed popularity, for example, in the early imperial period. Taking its point of departure in tombs from this period, the present paper will examine how we may discern concepts of secrecy and privacy from the architectural schemes of tombs at the necropolis area of the Via Laurentina near Ostia. The main aim is to examine various motivating factors behind the more inwardly designed tomb architecture as well as to shed light on the correlations between extrovert and introvert architectural strategies.

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Signe Krag (Classical Archaeology)

The secrets of funerary buildings in Roman Palmyra

On the outskirts of Palmyra lies a vast amount of large and impressive funerary buildings. These once housed the bodies, as well as funerary portraits, of deceased inhabitants from the elite in the city. Inscriptions have been recorded which refer to the funerary buildings as “the house of eternity” – the eternal house for the deceased. But who had access to these eternal resting places other than the deceased?

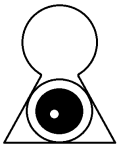
The buildings were sealed by large doors with locking mechanisms, indicating that not everyone could access the buildings at all points of time. Therefore, owners of the buildings must have controlled the accessibility, and they were the only ones to have, more or less, unlimited access. Furthermore, post-mortem rituals took place within the funerary buildings, which could include libation sacrifices or lighting of oil lamps in front of individual portraits. These were rituals, which were personal and secret to the deceased and the practitioner(s), and they were not meant to be public. Furthermore, inscriptions and texts concerning ownership, sale, and inheritance were most frequently located on the outside of the funerary buildings to ensure their visibility in the public, and thereby ensure a larger audience. Thus, different events occurred inside of the buildings, which were only revealed to the members of the family.

The paper will focus on the inside of the funerary buildings in Palmyra and to which extent they remained private, and thereby remained in a sphere of unrevealed secrets.

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Niels Bargfeldt (Classical Archaeology)

Lucius Iulius Optatus: Hidden or exposed on a Roman gravestone

In the Roman tradition of gravestones and monuments what is all important is the conveying of family ties and position. This is all done for the avail of positioning the deceased, the bereaved and the family within society. As such, the information that was passed on to the world is an ideal or even aggrandised version that accordingly makes the extraction of information from stones tricky. Being conscious of the bias in the material helps, but we have little chance (in most cases no chance) of knowing what is not told or even concealed.

In that respect Roman funerary monuments becomes the antithesis of secrecy and gouging secrets from the stones is simply impossible. If a secret was laid bare on the monument it would become part the eternal afterimage of the deceased, and hence the secret would be gone.

Nevertheless, secrecy and exposure go hand in hand, but who could imagine exposing a secret or just a bad trait on a gravestone. In that respect modern day is no different from the Roman world. Imagine, for instance, walking by a grave that was labelled 'Niels the awful bastard'. This paper looks at a puzzling gravestone from the frontier region and asks 'what is this about?'

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