

The Political Power of Sacred Texts

The conference *The Political Power of Sacred Texts*, held at the American Academy in Rome on 19 October 2017, brought together eminent scholars from Biblical, Qur'anic, Hindu and Chinese Studies to discuss the political influence and use of sacred texts through history and up to the present. John Ochsendorf, director of the Academy, welcomed the conference and emphasized the need for deep analysis to understand the role of religions in politics.

Katell Berthelot from the French National Centre for Scientific Research discussed the *Political Power of the Biblical Texts Pertaining to the Conquest of the Promised Land, from the Hasmonean Period to the Present*. Harold Attridge, former Dean of Yale Divinity school, reflected on how political conceptions found in the New Testament – Jesus' kingdom “not of this world” – have played out in political discourses. Angelika Neuwirth from Freie Universität Berlin, director of the Corpus Coranicum project, analysed the “explosive potential” of the qur'anic verse Q 17:1, which is used – against other evidence in the Qur'an – to deny the existence of Jerusalem's temple. Holger Zellentin from University of Cambridge reflected on the hermeneutical tension between *Originalism and Traditionalism* in both religious and secular history of law.

The afternoon session was opened by Gavin Flood from University of Oxford with a paper on the political use of the Bhagavad Gita in India. Tiziana Lippiello, professor and vice-rector of the University of Venice, spoke about the political influence of the Four Books in China, especially in Neo-Confucianism. Eckart Otto from Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich reflected on the political relevance of the Bible in the works of Max Weber, Hermann Cohen, and Ernst Troeltsch during World War I as the fundamental catastrophe of the Twentieth Century. Finally, Ron Hendel from University of California, Berkeley, spoke about the influence of Biblical thought in modern political theory, for example in the works of Macchiavelli, Grotius and Hobbes.

Fellows of the Academy, faculty and students of the Pontifical Biblical Institute and other guests enjoyed the lively discussions following each paper.

The presentations and discussions were livestreamed and are accessible on

<https://livestream.com/aarome/events/7826493>

The conference was organized by Dominik Markl (Pontifical Biblical Institute), Ron Hendel (University of California, Berkeley) and Lindsay Harris (American Academy in Rome).

It was co-sponsored by the American Academy in Rome and the Pontifical Biblical Institute.



(left to right) Harold Attridge, Angelika Neuwirth, Holger Zellentin, Katell Berthelot, Ron Hendel, John Ochsendorf, Tiziana Lippiello, Gavin Flood, Eckart Otto, Dominik Markl [© Cao Gia An]