

Conflict and Cooperation: Letters, Social Networks and Religious Controversies in Late Antiquity

Göttingen, 21-22 February 2025

Between 300 and 700 AD, Christian history was marked by intense religious conflicts that shaped the sociocultural landscape of Late Antiquity. These disputes, often recorded in letters, highlight both theological debates and complex social relationships. Bishops, monks, priests, and educated laypeople engaged in exchanges that formed influential social networks. Letters played a key role in building alliances, expressing loyalties, and defining opponents. While modern research has focused on doctrinal issues, the social context has been largely overlooked. This interdisciplinary conference brings together historians, theologians, and classicists to examine how letter writing fostered cooperation and conflict and influenced religious disputes in Late Antiquity.

Organiser: Dr. Carmen-Angela Cvetkovic
carmen.cvetkovic@theologie.uni-goettingen.de

Venue:
Heyne Haus, Büttner Raum 1
Papendiek 16, 37073 Göttingen



GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT
GÖTTINGEN IN PUBLICA COMMODA
SEIT 1737

Funded by DFG and Erich-Carl-Raddatz Foundation

Conference Programme

February 21, 2025

9:00 Coffee and Welcome

9:15 Alfons Fürst (Münster) - Keynote Lecture

Letters as medium of public debate in Late Antiquity

10:15 Marta Szada (Torun)

Late antique letters as tools of publishing, transmission, and critique of books (Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome)

11:00-11:30 Coffee break

11:30 Majiastina Kahlos (Lisbon)

Paulinus of Nola and the taming of barbarians

12:15 Jessica van't Westeinde (Bonn)

Religious rivalry and the dilemma of shared social networks: Jerome and Pelagius

13:00 Lunch

February 21, 2025

14:30 Christian Tornau (Würzburg)

Letters as a source and means of religious conflicts: The case of Augustine's anti-Donatist letters

15:15 Carmen-Angela Cvetkovic (Göttingen)

The Art of networking: Augustine's letter exchange in the context of the Pelagian controversy

16:00-16:30 Coffee break

16:30 Becca Grose (Tübingen/St-Andrews)

Willing combatants or accidentally in the crossfire? The Networks that gave North African bishops their pastoral exempla (online presentation)

17:15 David Natal (London)

Dead letters: Leo the Great and the illusion of authority

**19:30 Dinner
Kartoffelhaus**

February 22, 2025

8:30 Adam Schor (South Carolina)

Doctrinal partisanship inside the clergy and beyond: Simulating theological networks based on the known epistolary interactions of Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus and Ambrose of Milan

9:15 Andra Juganaru (Bucharest)

Forging alliances and navigating conflicts: the role of Gregory of Nazianzus' letters in the evolution of his social network

10:00-10:20 Coffee break

10:20 Madalina Toca (Bamberg)

Polemics and genre shifting in the letters of Basil of Caesarea in Syriac canonical collections

11:05 Matthijs Zoeter (Gent)

The war of the words: Writing letters in the conflict between Basil of Caesarea and Eusthatius of Sebaste

11:50-12:05 Coffee break

12:05 Andrei Macar (Göttingen)

From Seleucia-Ctesiphon to Qatar and Persis: Resolution of conflicts and dissemination of church doctrine through letters in 6th and 7th century east Syriac Christianity

12:50 Concluding remarks