

Presenter: Armin Lange, University of Vienna

Title: **“Anti-Semitic Readings of the Jewish Scriptures in Late Ancient Anti-Semitic Legislation”**

Panel: Bible, Christianity and Antisemitism

Based on the examples of the 146th Novella of the Justinian law code and Visigothic secular and ecclesiastical laws, this presentation will argue that late ancient antisemitic legislation depended on scriptural traditions and was in itself part of an interpretative conflict about the correct understanding of the Jewish scriptures. While late ancient Jews read their scriptures mostly in a literal way, late ancient Christians preferred an allegorical reading in order to apply the promises of the Jewish scriptures to Jesus of Nazareth. Christian antisemitic legislation in late Antiquity was thus motivated by religious prejudice against and religious condemnation of Jews. Christians even rationalized the legal persecution of Jews by deducting some of their anti-Semitic laws out of a distorted exegesis of the Christian Bible. While contemporary Christianity renounced to enforce its Christian readings of the Jewish scriptures on Jews, the underlying interpretative conflict remains and is a cause of Christian antisemitism even today.

The best way to encounter contemporary forms of antisemitism resulting from competing Christian claims to salvation which are based on Christian allegorical interpretations of the Jewish scriptures is the wide dispersion of the historical critical approach to the Jewish scriptures in Christianity. Such a literal approach will help Christians to recognize Judaism as an earlier and equally valid religion by anchoring a Jewish understanding of the Jewish scriptures in the Christian cultural memory.