

LEXICON PHILOSOPHICUM

International Journal for the History of Texts and Ideas

‘Superstitio’ from Ancient to Early Modern

Philosophy, Lexicography, and History of Ideas

Call for Papers for the End-2021 Issue of *Lexicon Philosophicum*

Deadline: November 15, 2021

In 15th-century Italy, Bartholomew Platina offered this two-sided advice to his readers: “Do not waste your time with superstitions, do not let hypocrites deceive you” (“duo ... maxime attendenda sunt, unum ne superstitione tempus teras, alterum ne ab hypocritis decipiare”, *De Principe*, III). Platina quotes, as it is customary, the dual authority of Cicero and Lactantius, whose definitions of ‘superstitio’ (as opposed to true ‘religio’) had framed the idea for centuries.

The circulation of Cicero’s *De natura deorum* and *De divinatione* and, eventually, of Lucretius, as well as the reception of Plutarch’s and Theophrastus’ treatments of ‘deisidaimonía’, provided a conceptual framework that could be exploited not only in the new religious conflicts, but also in a vast array of ideal controversies. It covered deviant religious knowledge as well as the demonological sphere and magical, hermetic, cabalistic, and alchemical practices. Luther associated superstition with the ‘tyranny of Rome’, Hume and Kant with ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘Schwärmerei’; Rousseau with the birth of astronomy, Comte with primitivism – and a German dissertation of 1720 lambasted the ‘superstitio medica’.

The philosophical cultures of early modernity appropriated the concept with a characteristic focus on the critical use of reason in science, morals and politics. In Cicero’s *De natura deorum*, humanists had found the idea that superstition is a vice (II, 7) from which one can be delivered (I, 45). The Early Modern philosophical landscape would eventually shift from Cicero’s suggestion that only (the true) religion delivers from superstition (ND I, 117) to the most radical 17th- and 18th-century thinkers’ conviction that all religion is superstition. Inside this apparently simple development, a complex accumulation of long-lasting debates uprose, involving primary traditions, texts, and authors (from Augustinian and Thomistic theologians to Erasmian philologists, from Bacon to Hobbes, from Bayle to Voltaire and to Jaucourt’s article “Superstition” in the *Encyclopédie*).

Lexicon Philosophicum is the flagship journal of ILIESI (Istituto per il Lessico Intellettuale Europeo e Storia delle Idee, <http://www.iliesi.cnr.it>). It investigates its particular domain – the ‘history of texts and ideas’ – in a broad vision of the boundaries



of philosophical production, and through the peculiar lens of the historiography of learned terminology that characterizes the ILIESI. While historians have often studied ‘superstition’ tracing past practices of now sunken beliefs and systems of belief, we are especially interested in charting the intricate lexical and semantic field that originates from and surrounds ‘superstition’: a web of word usages, associations, and meanings, as well as of connected terms and concepts, that arose in the early modern reception of ancient debates and in the transformation, extensions, and innovations that modernity brought about in this domain.

We invite submissions of papers to be included in the special issue of *Lexicon Philosophicum* on ‘Superstitio’, that will appear at the end of 2021. Contributions may focus on concepts and lexica stemming from individual philosophers, from dynamics of cultural transfer, from debates and controversies, etc. The issue will include some invited contributions from international scholars. We encourage young scholars, including post-docs and Ph.D. students, to submit. Please refer to the journal website for submission instructions. All submissions will be double-blind refereed.