Religions of the ancient Mediterranean were built around power, efficacy, and expectation. Gods were invoked as healers, protectors, judges, and guarantors of cosmic order; rituals promised stability; oracles offered guidance; prayers sought relief; and vows established bonds between mortals and the divine. Yet, ancient religious life was equally marked by disappointment, ambiguity, and breakdown. Gods could remain silent; rituals could fail; oracles could mislead; prayers could go unanswered; and worshippers could doubt, abandon, or renegotiate their religious commitments.

The OMICRON project – *Obsolescent. Managing Divine Inefficiency, Coping with Ritual Oblivion and Negligence* – proposes to make these moments of "religious failure" a central object of investigation. Rather than asking how gods were made powerful and effective, OMICRON explores what happened when divine or ritual systems did not perform as expected, and how individuals and communities responded to such failures.

Failure could arise from divine ignorance, absence, impotence, deception, emotional instability, ineffective intervention, or disrupted communication. It could also be human: doubt, unbelief, conversion, loss of religious motivation, coerced obedience, ritual error, neglected cult, or moral conflict. Far from necessarily undermining religious systems, however, such crises generated mechanisms of explanation, negotiation, blame, repair, reinterpretation, and adaptation.

Through two international conferences to be held in Madrid, OMICRON brings together scholars working across the religions of the ancient Mediterranean and across disciplinary boundaries. Its aim is to investigate how religious failure was conceptualized, narrated, experienced, and managed, and how moments of silence, misfire, disappointment, and crisis could become powerful engines of religious transformation, reshaping gods, rituals, narratives, institutions, and communities.

Organising Committee:

- Ginevra Benedetti (Università degli Studi di Siena)
- Valentino Gasparini (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)
- Beatriz Pañeda Murcia (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid)
- Ramón Soneira Martínez (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften)

Information:

- Valentino Gasparini (vgaspari@hum.uc3m.es)

Obsolescent.
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uc3m | Universidad Carlos III de Madrid
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OMICRON 1

Obsolescent. Managing Divine Inefficiency, Coping with Ritual Oblivion and Negligence

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

4-6
NOVEMBER 2026

Universidad Carlos III de Madrid
Campus Madrid - Puerta de Toledo
Salón de Grados

Wednesday, 4 November

15:00-15:10: **Welcome**

15:10-15:30: **Valentino Gasparini** (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)
The OMICRON Project. An Introduction

AXIS 1 – When Divine Ontology Fails

Chair: Valentino Gasparini (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)

15:30-15:50: **Emmanuelle Palermiti** (ANHIMA - UMR 8210)
Un exemple d'absence divine. La « grève » de Déméter dans le mythe du rapt de Koré

15:50-16:10: **Manuel Galzerano**
(Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa)
Silent Gods, Victorious Giants and Nature's Flaws in Lucretius' De rerum natura

16:10-16:30: **Anna Angelini** (Università degli Studi di Siena)
Challenging Divine Morality? A Historico-Religious Approach to the Imprecatory Psalms through Psalm 109 *as a Test Case*

16:30-16:50: **Eduard Iricinschi** (Universität Erfurt)
Manichaean Ritual Preparations for the End. Sin Forgiveness, Death Liturgy, and Metempsychosis

16:50-17:20: **Discussion**

17:20-17:50: **Coffee break**

AXIS 2 – When Divine Agency Fails

Chair: Anna Angelini (Università degli Studi di Siena)

17:50-18:10: **Vasilis Tsiolis** (Universidad de Castilla - La Mancha)
Misaligned Divine Agency and Corrective Coercion in Greek Religious Practice. Disciplining the God

18:10-18:30: **Emilia Savva** (Πανεπιστήμιο Κύπρου)
Too Harsh on Guilty Eyes. Ovid's Actaeon

18:30-18:50: **Francesca Lorenzini** (Università Roma Tre)
The Image of Divine Abandonment in Flavius Josephus' Bellum Iudaicum. *A Contextual Analysis*

18:50-19:10: **Fernando Bermejo-Rubio** (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid)
Why It Does Not Ultimately Matter That Prophecies Fail. Understanding Religious Fiascoes in the Light of Cognitive Dissonance Theory

19:10-19:40: **Discussion**

20:45: **Dinner**

Thursday, 5 November

AXIS 3 – When Divine-Human Communication Fails

Chair: Ginevra Benedetti (Università degli Studi di Siena)

09:30-09:50: **Alain G.F. Blomart**
(Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona)
Des oracles et des cultes guérisseurs inefficaces ou frauduleux ? Construction d'un discours critique entre scepticisme et délégitimation religieuse chez les auteurs gréco-romains

09:50-10:10: **Beatrice Lietz** (Université de Lausanne)
Concealing the Oracle's Prescriptions. A Declamatory Perspective on Religious Failure in Roman Imperial Culture (2nd century CE)

10:10-10:30: **Jan Rückl** (Univerzita Karlova, Praha)
No Success like Failure? Productive Aspects of Failed Rituals and Prophecies in the Hebrew Bible

10:30-10:50: **Mateusz Kusio** (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven)
The Delay of the parousia *and the Obsolescence of Oracles*

10:50-11:20: **Discussion**

11:20-11:50: **Coffee break**

AXIS 4 – When Human Ontology Fails

Chair: Ramón Soneira Martínez
(Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften)

11:50-12:10: **Cătălin Enache** (Universität Wien)
Theodicy and Atheism in the Classical Age

12:10-12:30: **Nicole Hartmann** (Independent Researcher)
Volatile Religious Commitment between Indifference, Opportunism and Posing a Threat in the Roman Empire

12:30-12:50: **Madalina Vartejanu-Joubert** (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris)
Négation de la théorie de la redistribution dans le corpus talmudique comme expression d'une lucidité sceptique

12:50-13:10: **Valentino Gasparini & Emiliano R. Urciuoli**
(Universidad Carlos III de Madrid & Università degli Studi di Bologna)
*From Ritual Failure to Realignment. The Fragility of Urban Religious Commitment in 1st-Century CE Ephesus (*Acts 19*)*

13:10-13:40: **Discussion**

14:00: **Lunch**

AXIS 5 – When Human Agency Fails

Chair: Beatriz Pañeda Murcia
(Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid)

16:00-16:20: **Luca Lorenzon** (École française d'Athènes)
Religion Made Ridiculous. Ritual Precautions, Obsessions, and Excess in Theophrastus

16:20-16:40: **Maxence Badaire** (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)
The clodiana religio. *Ritual Transgression and Political Strategy at the End of the Roman Republic*

16:40-17:00: **Discussion**

17:00-17:30: **Coffee break**

17:30-17:50: **Federico Dal Bo** (Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia)
*"Bring Him Up". Jewish Strategies for Divine Miscommunication, Ritual Embarrassment, and the Long Repair of the "Sacrifice of Isaac" (*Genesis 22*)*

17:50-18:10: **Maria Dell'Isola** (Universität Erfurt)
Misinterpreting Divine Teaching and Commands. The Ambiguous Relationship between Human Obedience and Religious Zeal in Acts of John 48–54

18:10-18:30: **Discussion**

20:45: **Dinner**

Friday, 6 November

AXIS 6 – When Human-Divine Communication Fails

Chair: Jesús Fernández Navarro
(Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)

09:30-09:50: **Hedvig von Ehrenheim** (Göteborgs universitet)
Unanswered Prayers in the Cult of Asklepios. Private Imagination and Cultic Strategies

09:50-10:10: **Marios Koutsoukos** (Independent Researcher)
Lest I Apply Worse Tortures unto You. Ritualistic Countermeasures for Divine Absence in Graeco-Egyptian Magic

10:10-10:30: **Dario Cellamare** (Università degli Studi di Padova)
Faillir pour (mieux) faire. Les échecs rituels comme dispositifs d'autorité

10:30-10:50: **Adrien Coignoux** (Université Paris Cité)
The Death of Tullus Hostilius. A Didactic Failure?

10:50-11:20: **Discussion**

11:20-11:50: **Coffee break**

Chair: Fabio Porzia
(Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Roma)

11:50-12:10: **Chiara Caporale** (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa)
Genesis and Collapse. Lucretius on the Breakdown of Religion

12:10-12:30: **Maureen Attali** (Université Paris Nanterre)
Un rituel aléatoire ? L'efficacité du jeûne pour la pluie comme test de la légitimité rabbinique

12:30-12:50: **Klazina Staat** (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)
Framing the Other through Ritual Failure. Divine Inefficiency as an Apologetic Strategy in Late Antique Hagiography

12:50-13:20: **Discussion**

13:20-13:40: **Ginevra Benedetti** (Università degli Studi di Siena)
Beatriz Pañeda Murcia
(Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid)
Ramón Soneira Martínez
(Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften)
Conclusions

14:00: **Lunch**