

Call for Papers: 2026 Symposium Peregrinum XIII Catastrophes and Rebirth in the Greek and Roman World

June 18-20, (June 26 on zoom)

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Certain peoples fear the number 13, but at **Symposium Peregrinum XIII** we embrace it as a chance to gather again and discuss **Catastrophes and Rebirth in the Greek and Roman World** across myth, history, literature, philosophy, and material culture.

Illness and death were often “dehistoricized” (to use Ernesto de Martino’s expression) so that religious beliefs could provide models of salvation: from Asclepius’ healing to interpretations of suffering as the consequence of guilt, and from hopes for Elysium to reincarnation.

Catastrophe and renewal also structured the life of cities, which were imagined as enduring: rites, mysteries, and sacred objects could guarantee survival and “rebirth.” Messene was linked to rebirth through the mysteries of Andania; Rome preserved sacred objects and the Vestals and was reborn after the Gallic sack thanks to Camillus. Destruction could even become paradoxically preservative: during Gothic and Hunnic invasions, major bronze statues – including one of the symbols of Brescia, the Vittoria Alata – were concealed to prevent melting. The destruction and re-foundation of Capua, Carthage, and Corinth deserve renewed attention, since they were certainly accompanied by rites that largely still elude us. To what extent do such processes constitute “rebirth,” and to what extent do they create something entirely new?

Ancient thought also confronted the fear that humanity itself might end. This fear was reframed through models of large-scale design: cyclical destructions and renewals (*ekpyroseis*), successive ages of humankind (Golden, Silver, etc.), and astral “Great Years.” Later, Christianity transformed ancient beliefs with the promise of Heaven, the threat of Hell, and expectations surrounding the end of the world and the Final Judgment. The precariousness of life in the Late Empire favored such hopes and anxieties, sometimes shared even by non-Christian communities.

Political orders, too, were subject to catastrophe and new beginnings. The fall of tyrannies and the end of civil conflict could be experienced as a civic rebirth (e.g., Hippias, Tarquinius, the Thirty Tyrants, and Rome’s settlement under Augustus). In Rome, renewal could be ritually celebrated through the *Ludi Saeculares* or marked by the “annual nail” on the Capitoline, inaugurating a year hoped to be better than the last.

We welcome individual papers and panel proposals on any kind of ancient disaster, whether environmental, epidemiological, political, military, or personal, **and/or** on rebirth and transformation, broadly from c. 1200 BC to c. AD 550. Topics may include, for example: divine and mythic rebirth (Dionysus twice-born); political and dynastic renewal (e.g., AD 68–69 and the rise of the Flavians); disastrous decisions and “falls” (from Croesus to Xerxes, Alcibiades, Cyrus the Younger, Crassus); major plagues and natural catastrophes (Athenian plague, Lucretius’

plague, Vesuvius, Thera, Galen's plague); catastrophic rulers (Caligula, Elagabalus, Commodus); destructive marriages (e.g., Jason and Medea, Paris and Helen, Peleus and Thetis); and civil war as supreme disaster (Rome's civil wars, Corcyra war against Corinth, Sparta's counter-revolution against Agis IV, Syracuse under Dion).

Finally, moments of loss and pain can be interpreted as thresholds of renewal and salvation: Demeter/Persephone and the Eleusinian Mysteries; Oedipus at Colonus; flood myths (Deucalion and Pyrrha); the productive legacy of Socrates' execution; Troy's destruction as the remote origin of Rome; and captivities that generated new knowledge (e.g., Terence, Polybius, Josephus).

This year we return to Northern Italy and to our established format: **half-days of papers and discussion**, followed by an **optional afternoon visit** to a nearby museum or archaeological site.

Presenters will be invited to submit expanded versions of their papers for possible publication in the peer-reviewed journal *Acta Antiqua*.

Getting to Brescia: You can fly into Milan (two airports, Linate LIN 46 miles/74 km or Malpensa MXP 74 miles/119 km) or Milan-Bergamo (BGY, 26.6 miles/42 km), or Verona (VRN) (35 miles/56 km). One can reach Brescia by train or bus. The venues are centrally located and easily reachable on foot or via local transport. A short list of recommended accommodations will be shared with accepted speakers.

Format and online participation: The symposium will take place in person in Brescia. Since some participants may be unable to attend on site, we will also host one or more online sessions via Zoom on June 26.

Send your abstract of ≤ 350 words with a title to gaius@berkeley.edu and attilio.mastrocinque@googlemail.com and hwalker@bates.edu by the end of March.



The Vittoria Alata, the symbol of Brescia.