



Valentina A. Grasso

“I am a final-year Ph.D. candidate at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. At the University of Cambridge I am working on the history of late antique pre-Islamic Arabia under the supervision of Professor Garth Fowden. My Ph.D. delves into the political and cultural developments of pre-Islamic late antique Arabia by probing a socio-political exploration of cults in the shaping of Arabian identities. In the future I plan to work on the interactions between Arabia and Ethiopia during Late Antiquity.

In the last three years at Cambridge, I have co-taught courses at the Faculty of Divinity, presented a paper, organised twenty-five conferences, published several academic articles, and received eighteen grants and awards.

I was also the president of several societies (film, paintings and poetry) based at my college, St Edmund’s. I was a member of the Religious Studies Subject Committee at the Faculty of Divinity (2017-19) and my college CR Finance Committee (2018-20). Finally, I was a committee member of the Cambridge University History Society (2019-20) and part of the Cambridge University Water Polo team (2019-20). I managed to organise a small arts festival (later publishing an arts magazine) at St Edmund’s College (2018) as well as the annual students’ conference as St Edmund’s College Academic Officer 2020-21.

So – my secret? I always know where to find the best coffee in town”.



Anya Williams

“Hello, my name is Anya and I’m from South Wales. I’m a second year TRPR undergraduate. I am currently studying New Testament Greek, Ethics and Faith, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. I am particularly grateful for having been given the opportunity to study Greek. Before I began my degree, it was the element of the course I was most concerned about; it has turned out to be one of my favourite areas of study! I have also particularly enjoyed studying the gender dimension in a variety of religious traditions. Early study of many of the world’s religions was male dominated; however, more recent research has highlighted the important role women played in the formative stages of many world religions. Recent scholarship has also shown that many important religious texts can be read in a variety of ways, offering a variety of role models to devotees. It has also been interesting to have the opportunity to study the work of contemporary female philosophers such as Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot.

Alongside my studies, I am involved in the ‘Task Force’ branch of Cambridge ‘Student Community Action’ and Cambridge Welsh Society. I enjoy going on walks around Cambridge. After completing my degree, I plan to complete a secondary PGCE and work as an RS teacher. In both school and at University I have encountered inspiring female educators; perhaps female perspectives on many topics in religious studies can lead to insightful observations and a different perspective to male-centred scholarship. Studying TRPR has highlighted to me the importance of women in core parts of society. Therefore, I hope I can help to encourage the next generation to have the belief that they can achieve whatever they set their minds to and enjoy studying religion”.



Eliane Bedu

“Hi! My name is Eliane. I am an international second-year undergraduate reading Theology. My objective when I arrived at Cambridge was to learn as many religious traditions as possible. I wanted to get a wide overview of what the word “religion” meant. After focusing on Christianity and contemporary religion in the first year, I decided to completely change my curriculum in the second year, and I took up Modern Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism and Hinduism. This has helped me to know what to specialise my research in. From now on, I have decided focusing on the effect of decolonisation on political religious groups. This has also comforted me in my choice to continue my studies with an MPhil at the end of my Tripos.

My experience at Cambridge has also allowed me to develop extra-curricular activities. I am part of this year’s Pink Week committee, as an education officer. I have helped to organise and presented several informational events in order to raise funds for breast cancer research, which is a cause close to my heart. I have also founded my own literary society back home. My next project is to start writing for Varsity in the fashion section, another one of my passions”.



Dr Marieke Dhont

“My research situates Jewish literature in Greek both within the world of Hellenistic literature as well as within our understanding of Second Temple Judaism. The interaction between Jewish and Greek traditions, or between Hellenism and Judaism, constitutes one of the big questions of the ancient world. Judaism attests to the different ways in which Hellenism could be shaped to fit minority contexts. Yet, Jews simultaneously developed their own identity through these Greek-language works. In the history of scholarship, however, this interaction has been fundamentally misrepresented: While the use of Greek has often been considered a diminishment of Jewishness, Jewish-Greek translators and authors have also been dismissed as Greek writers and portrayed as outsiders in the Greek cultural world. By reconsidering the literary evidence of the Septuagint translations and Jewish compositions in Greek, both poetry and prose, within their (socio)linguistic and literary contexts, I aim to gain a better understanding of Jewish multilingualism in the Second Temple period and show the dynamics of cultural diversity in the Hellenistic world”.



Dr Hjördis Becker-Lindenthal

Leverhulme Early Career Fellow

Research Project: Søren Kierkegaard's Reception of Johannes Tauler

“I have always been fascinated by questions pertaining to the development of theological and philosophical concepts through history, and how someone’s ideas are taken up by another thinker, sometimes hundreds of years later. This is the case with Kierkegaard’s relation to the mystic Johannes Tauler. In Kierkegaard scholarship, it has been a tacit assumption that the 19th century Dane was familiar with the thought of the 14th-century friar, but how he came to know his work, and whether he read Tauler’s sermons directly or got to know them through Pietists’ summaries has so far remained opaque in scholarship. At the beginning of my project, I thus had to do some detective work, following traces, analysing hints and collecting evidence. A comparative close reading of Tauler’s Second Sermon on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (using the edition that was listed in Kierkegaard’s library) and Kierkegaard’s *Practice in Christianity* provided strong reasons for my hypothesis that Kierkegaard indeed engaged with Tauler’s sermons directly. A central role plays the idea of *Entbildung*, a Middle-High German term used by Tauler to conceptualises detachment as the mind’s cleansing of images. Both Tauler’s and Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology hinge on their understanding of *Entbildung*. Comparing both thinkers with this regard sheds new light on their understanding of selfhood, agency, grace, the role of language and images, and their ethics of neighbour love”.



Dr Férdia Stone-Davis

Faculty of Divinity

Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology

“I work at the interface of theology, philosophy, and music. I studied at the Faculty of Divinity for my BA, MPhil and PhD, before completing a MMus in Music Performance at Trinity College of Music, London. I have worked in departments of each discipline in the UK and Germany. I am currently Director of Research at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology (a member of the Cambridge Theological Federation) and an Affiliated Lecturer at the Faculty of Divinity.

My research focuses on music and sense-making, and related areas of theological knowledge, theological anthropology and ethics. This is embedded within longstanding interests in theology and the arts, and theological language. I have published on music and its relation to beauty, transcendence, ethics, and sense-making. I am currently working on projects concerned with listening, attention, the narrative self, and the sublime”.