



Congrès annuel / Annual Meeting 2026

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Biography:

Professor Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge is Chair of Religion, History, and Society in the ancient Greek World at the Collège de France, a world-famous higher educational institution in Paris and an international leader in research. In 2017, she became the first woman elected to a chair in the field of ancient Greek history, after a rich career at the University of Liège in Belgium, where she still holds a professorship. As an expert on Greek religion, with an interest also in other Mediterranean religions, she is the author of more than two hundred publications, among which are several monographs and edited volumes. In her various roles and by combining historical, philological, and anthropological methods, Professor Pirenne-Delforge has situated the study of ancient religion at the forefront of contemporary historical and archaeological investigations.

Taking the Greek Gods Seriously: An Examination of How Polytheism Works

The ancient Greek lexicon lacks a term that is an exact equivalent of what we call “religion”. However, many Greek expressions bear a resemblance to what we mean by this concept: “what pertains to the gods”, “sacred matters”, or “traditional customs concerning the gods”. In this polytheistic culture, the gods are very much present and potentially numerous, demanding homage from humans. Consequently, for nearly a millennium, Greek cities built hundreds of temples for their gods and organized thousands of festivals and sacrifices in their honour. They also featured deities and heroes in a vast array of narrative traditions. This rich body of representations and practices, deeply rooted in community life, demands an approach that recognizes the differences between this system and the monotheistic religious cultures that partially characterize modernity. This lecture will address this very requirement and could have been entitled, provocatively: “Did the Greeks really believe in their gods?”

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Professor Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge

Tuesday, May 5th, 2026

Dunning Auditorium

6:30 pm



Queen's
UNIVERSITY

Classics and
Archaeology