



Ludwig Boltzmann Institut
Neulateinische Studien

*Wir erlauben uns, herzlich zum **Vortrag***

Towards a new history of Tacitism

von

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*im Zentrum für Alte Kulturen („Atrium“, Langer Weg 11, SR 3)
einzuladen.*

In this paper I shall present the project to write a new history of Tacitism, and for which funding is currently being sought. Tacitism is the sceptical and secular political and historical thought inspired by the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus, which flourished in the seventeenth century. Tacitist authors were among the very first to advocate secularising political ideas, some 75 years before the renewal of such debates by the early Enlightenment. Tacitism's focus on observed reality rather than moral precept precedes the rise of the same 'realist' attitude in the Natural sciences and may well have been its principal source. However, in spite of the eventual success of secularism and Tacitism in European political thought and practice, these movements were highly controversial and confined to very small (intellectual) minorities at least until the later 17th century. At present, no general history of Tacitism is available.

The problems of acceptance that Tacitism encountered can be recognised in the texts by the complex rhetorical forms and strategies they contain and by the personal difficulties which most Tacitist authors experienced in their own lives or publishing their works. This project will employ these literary forms, strategies and difficulties to gauge the degree of acceptance of Tacitist ideas at their respective times and places, and thus to uncover the neglected 'underground' aspects of the early history of Tacitism and secularisation. Thus we shall rewrite the history of the processes by which non-Christian ideas and practices entered the political mentality of the West. Secondly we will develop a research method for intellectual history which will enable the use of methods and approaches from the history of literature in the field of intellectual history.

This project will produce a history (the first) of Tacitism in Europe. It consists of five sub-programmes, each focusing on a particular set of texts from the Northern and Southern Netherlands, England, Italy, Spain and the Lutheran areas in Germany and Sweden respectively.