

**SESSION TITLE:**      **Decoding rituals from visual representations**

**ORGANISER:**            Torill Christine Lindstrøm (*Norway*)

**SESSION PROPOSAL:**

Our knowledge of rituals, both from prehistoric and historical times, is largely based on various kinds of visual representations, or what we believe to be such representations. Actually, to identify a representation as referring to ritual is in itself an interpretative act, often based on analogies from other archaeological and anthropological research and from projections of our own personal or cultural associations, ideas, and traditions of rituals. Perhaps archaeologists have a general tendency to "see" traces of rituals in artefacts, sites, and visual representations that actually are quite ambiguous and render several, or multiple, interpretations possible.

Similar processes influence the further, deeper and detailed deconstructions and interpretations of the visual representations. Several questions are vital: How do we identify the relevant data? How do we label them? How do we deconstruct and decipher them: what theories and analytical tools do we use? Are semiotics/semiology useful tools in decoding symbols? What kinds of comparisons and analogies are relevant? Finally, how do we deal with theoretical issues?

This session invites contributions regarding visual culture from all periods: Prehistoric, Classical, and Medieval.

**PLEASE CONTACT:**

**Torill Christine Lindstrøm**  
University of Bergen  
Norway  
T: +4792681744  
E: [Torill.Lindstrom@psysp.uib.no](mailto:Torill.Lindstrom@psysp.uib.no)