



**THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday, June 10, 2025**

**Pelayo Huerta Segovia**, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid/American School of Classical Studies at Athens

***Immobilizing Hermes: The Herm in the Cult Spaces of Attica (6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE)***

#### **ABSTRACT**

Hermes were an omnipresent feature in the civic and sacred landscape of fifth-century Athens. Composed of a bearded head, an erect phallus, and two short arms or shoulders, this image of Hermes was frequently encountered by the ancient passerby during his movements through the *asty* and the *chōra*. Classical sources attest to the installation of herms along roads, in gymnasia, private houses, the Agora, and within sanctuaries (*hiera*). While modern historiography continues to debate the circumstances, place, and reasons for its origin, ancient authors consistently presented the herm as a statue intrinsic to Athenian tradition and rooted in the local ancestral past (Hdt. II, 51.1; Thuc. VI, 27.1; Paus. I, 24.3; Paus. IV, 33.3).

This talk addresses the presence of herms in the cult spaces of Attica through a material and visual approach. The primary aim is to explore the perception, functions, and semantic range of the herm within sacred spaces, with particular attention to the interactions between viewer/worshipper and this semi-anthropomorphic divine image. To that end, a selection of key archaeological contexts and herm fragments found in Attica and Athens, dating to the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, will be examined, alongside relevant literary and iconographic evidence. Special emphasis will be placed on the material and textual strategies employed in the display of herms, which, it will be argued, in certain contexts contributed to ‘simulating’ the epiphanic embodiment of Hermes. This artifact fulfilled a multiplicity of functions within sacred spaces— functions that must be individually examined and collectively redefined. As it will be demonstrated, the herm should not be understood merely as a static ‘marker’ or ‘guardian’ of sacred space, as it is often described in scholarship, but rather as a divine image that *actively* mediated and shaped cult practice.

**The seminar takes place Tuesday, June 10, 2025, at 17.00 (Athens) in a hybrid format with live presence at the Swedish Institute at Athens and online via Zoom.**

**To participate, please register at:**

<https://www.sia.gr/en/events.php?eid=496#ParticipationForm>