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THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN THE ANCIENT THOUGHT

Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the evolution of religious tolerance in the ancient world, analyzing the influence of political structures, social traditions and philosophical concepts on the formation of the boundaries of freedom of religion. Special attention is paid to the mechanisms of interaction between the state and religion, as well as the influence of legal norms on the perception of religious diversity.

It is proved, that in the Greek polis, religious rituals were an integral part of civic identity, contributing to the formation of ideas about the acceptability of various cults. Philosophical issues related to freedom of thought and critical reflection on faith were reflected in the works of thinkers who investigated the nature of the divine and its relationship to human life. For example, Xenophanes criticized anthropomorphic ideas about the gods, while Protagoras questioned the possibility of knowing the divine, which stimulated discussions about religious tolerance.

It is argued, Ancient historians such as Herodotus and Polybius recorded the dynamics of public attitudes towards religious innovations, noting both cases of acceptance and rejection of new cults. In the Roman context, the imperial strategies for adapting to religious diversity are explored, which combined elements of integration and control. The Roman policy of "inclusive syncretism" allowed the inclusion of the deities of conquered peoples in the pantheon, which contributed to the strengthening of imperial unity.

It is found that the legal and social mechanisms that defined the limits of religious tolerance had a significant impact on the transformation of religious

policy in the period of late antiquity. The Edict of Milan of 313, issued by Constantine the Great, legalized Christianity, which was an important step towards the recognition of religious pluralism. However, later, with the growing influence of Christianity, there was a restriction of traditional pagan cults, which indicates the complexity and ambiguity of the processes of religious tolerance in antiquity.

Thus, the article provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors that influenced the formation and transformation of religious tolerance in ancient society, emphasizing the relationship between the political, social and philosophical aspects of this phenomenon.

Keywords: Antiquity, philosophy, tolerance, religious tolerance, freedom of religion, Greco-Roman world.

Introduction

The ancient world did not merely coexist with religious diversity – it created mechanisms that defined the boundaries of religious freedom. These systems influenced politics, law, and social institutions, and understanding them helps explain modern religious conflicts and ways to resolve them. The issue of religious tolerance was not viewed from a moral perspective but as a tool of governance. Greek poleis, Hellenistic kingdoms, and the Roman Empire established a balance between recognizing local cults and maintaining centralized control. Laws, rituals, and philosophical concepts did not simply regulate the religious sphere but also determined the stability of society.

The practical significance of this study lies in analyzing which methods of interacting with religious groups strengthened the state and which led to crises. Historical experience shows that tolerance is not a concession but a deliberate strategy. Such an approach makes it possible to identify patterns that remain relevant today – from protecting freedom of religion to regulating religious influence on public life.

Research methods

This study is based on a philosophical analysis of the phenomenon of religious tolerance in antiquity, revealing its conceptual foundations through the perspectives of the Sophists, Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics. It examines the evolution of these ideas within the framework of ancient worldviews.

For a deeper analysis, historical-comparative and textual methods are employed, allowing for the comparison of ancient sources and the reconstruction of notions of religious freedom. A systemic approach helps to examine the influence of religious, political, and sociocultural factors that shaped the boundaries of religious tolerance in ancient society.

Research results

The issue of freedom of religion first emerged in ancient civilizations such as Egypt and Mesopotamia and later in the classical world. Although rulers in some cases imposed the cult of a particular deity, there is considerable evidence of a tolerant attitude toward the religions of conquered peoples, as indicated by the ancient formula, "Every nation has its own gods." Nevertheless, such practices often did not imply the actual recognition of an individual's right to abstain from the dominant religion. Only in classical societies, particularly within Greek city-states, was this issue more clearly articulated, as citizen participation in political life and the development of philosophical thought encouraged a re-evaluation of dogmatic beliefs and the search for ways to peacefully coexist with different faiths.

In Greek poleis, where there was no rigidly segregated priesthood, a new approach to religion took shape. Mythological narratives gradually lost their status as absolute explanatory principles since natural philosophy and other scientific disciplines began to explain the universe from the standpoint of rational thought. However, even in this context, religious consciousness still played an important integrative role, fostering the unity of citizens. From this dualism – between collective rituals and emerging freethinking – arose the understanding that individuals had the right to critically reassess spiritual traditions and choose their own form of religious expression.

To explore this phenomenon more deeply, it is necessary to distinguish between three closely related concepts that are sometimes conflated. Freedom of conscience implies a broad worldview choice, encompassing both religious and non-religious beliefs. Freedom of religion refers specifically to the individual's right to practice or abstain from practicing a particular religion, to perform rituals, or to refuse them. Religious tolerance, in turn, is a socio-ethical phenomenon that acknowledges the right of others to exist and publicly express their faith, even if it differs from the majority's beliefs. Confusion between these terms can lead to misunderstandings when discussing the actual mechanisms for protecting spiritual freedom.

In modern times, these different aspects of spiritual rights have been affirmed and enshrined in international documents. UNESCO's Declaration of Principles on Tolerance emphasizes that tolerance is not merely passive non-resistance but also active respect for the diversity of cultures, religions, and beliefs. Contemporary society is increasingly aware that religious tolerance, understood in this broad and dynamic sense, strengthens peaceful coexistence, fosters dialogue between different worldviews, and paves the way for genuine spiritual and cultural progress.

Alongside notions of the punitive will of the gods, other traditions in the ancient world affirmed the possibility of spiritual harmony, even in times

of instability and war. In certain sacred places, religion was perceived not as a source of fear of punishment but as a means of maintaining order and peaceful coexistence. One such unique example was Eleusis (Ἐλευσίς), the center of the mystery cult dedicated to the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Later, in the Roman era, the Eleusinian Mysteries became an example of the fine line between what was acceptable and unacceptable in Roman religious thought. Although these mysteries involved nocturnal and secret rites, they were not only permitted but actively supported by many Roman emperors, including Augustus, who himself underwent initiation in Eleusis.

The unique cultural role of Greece within the Roman Empire, the ancient origins of the cult, and its mythology, well-known to the Romans, secured its high prestige at least until the 4th century AD. Moreover, the Romans recognized the special status of certain Greek sanctuaries on a legal level. For instance, the Roman jurist Ulpian mentioned deities officially authorized to receive wills and inheritances, the vast majority of which were Greek temples. This indicates that despite Roman rule, Greek religious traditions retained their significance and influence within the empire [1, p. 223-224].

Despite the upheavals of Greek history, Eleusis maintained its status as an inviolable space until the 4th century AD, when Emperor Theodosius I, in his effort to Christianize the Roman Empire, banned pagan cults, including the Eleusinian Mysteries. In 396 AD, the Visigoths under the leadership of Alaric plundered Eleusis, destroying its temples and putting an end to its centuries-old religious tradition.

Aelius Aristides wrote in *Orationes*: «When the Greeks began a civil war and chaos and turmoil reigned everywhere, only Eleusis remained untouched» («πολέμου δὲ συμβάντος τοῖς Ἑλλησι πρὸς ἀλλήλους πολλοῦ καὶ πάντων ἄνω καὶ κάτω γενομένων, μόνη δὴ τρόπον γέ τινα Ἐλευσίς ἠρέμει...») [2, p.45].

The religious space of Eleusis was revered by all sides as being "above" military and political conflicts. The Mysteries were perceived not just as an absence of enmity but as a profound spiritual purification capable of dissolving hostilities and healing society. Their significance was so great that any violation was considered a grave crime. In 415 BC, Alcibiades faced the threat of trial and exile for allegedly desecrating the Eleusinian Mysteries and profaning the Hermai. This case demonstrates how crucial the preservation of sacred rituals was for the Athenians. Not only individual citizens but also the greatest rulers recognized the inviolability of this place. "The Philips, the Alexanders, the Antipaters, and other rulers who shook Greece with wars acknowledged that Eleusis was truly untouchable and above themselves." Political forms and social structures could collapse, but sacred rituals continued to unite people and pass down cultural values from generation to generation. Even the most powerful

rulers respected the special significance of the Mysteries, recognizing Eleusis' right to autonomy.

Every year during the Eleusinian Mysteries, a sacred truce was declared, similar to that which accompanied the Olympic Games. This measure ensured the safety of pilgrims traveling to Eleusis to participate in initiation rites. The truce lasted 55 days, covering both the Lesser Mysteries (in spring) and the Greater Mysteries (in autumn). The Eleusinian truce illustrates how religious tradition could transcend state boundaries and foster mutual respect. The Mysteries, as a symbol of spiritual purification, outlived changing eras and rulers and left behind a legacy of religious tolerance and unity. In this sense, Eleusis can be seen as an example of a place where tolerance and religious freedom rose above military conflicts and political struggles.

At first glance, such beliefs may seem archaic and alien to us. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that there is nothing primitive about them: for the ancient Greeks and Romans, myths and legends about the gods occupied an important place in literary consciousness, but their religion was not merely a collection of mythological stories – just as for some modern religions, narratives about the origins of faith hold special significance. In the ancient world, gods were perceived as powerful forces and phenomena before which humans were defenseless. To ensure a more or less peaceful life, people sought to appease these forces. It was believed that natural resources, natural phenomena, talents in intellectual or artistic fields, and even beauty itself all stemmed from divine patrons.

With the changing views of Ionian thinkers and Athenian sophists in the 5th–4th centuries BC, a distinct understanding of religion began to take shape in Greece: strict rituals were seen as a "contract" with the gods, while much freer discussions about the divine were allowed. This divide is vividly reflected in Aristophanes' comedy *Clouds*, where Socrates is portrayed as a mocking skeptic of traditional gods, although by the end of the play, the gods still retain their power over human actions [3, p. 35]. The debates about the divine did not cancel religious rituals, demonstrating a high degree of tolerance for different viewpoints in ancient society.

Notably, a similar duality in perceptions of religious and social norms can be seen in the poetry of Sappho, for whom personal enmity was not merely an emotional reaction but also a consequence of political struggle and religious convictions: 'Enmity, predominantly conveyed in her poetry by the term ἐχθρός, was determined not only by personal factors – such as betrayal within Sappho's thiasus – but also by the political struggle for power on the island of Lesbos. The poetess explicitly opposed the tyranny that arose after the aristocratic rule of her relatives; thus, she sharply criticized girls who sided with her political adversaries, a criticism which extended into the realm of religious practices.

Her enmity was more than mere "blind hatred"; rather, it embodied a complex sentiment intertwined with political, religious, and social beliefs, the betrayal of which by anyone amounted, in her eyes, to betraying herself.' Thus, through the example of Sappho, we observe how personal, political, and religious elements were closely intertwined in shaping ideas about tolerance and social boundaries within ancient society [4, p. 144].

However, the nuances of this "freedom" were complex: Plato believed that Aristophanes' satirical depiction of Socrates indirectly influenced the philosopher's real-life trial. Nevertheless, the distinction in antiquity between mandatory religious practice and permissible intellectual critique remained an important sign of its tolerance. This is also evident in the descriptions of Strabo, who noted the abundance of diverse sacred sites and shrines – from temples of Poseidon to altars of the nymphs – highlighting the multiplicity of beliefs and worship practices. All of this forms an integral part of ancient culture, which, despite its temporal distance, strikingly echoes our own ideas about freedom of thought and religious diversity: «The entire land is filled with sanctuaries of Artemis, Aphrodite, and the nymphs, located in groves densely covered with flowers due to the abundance of water. Along the roads, herms are frequently encountered, while on the coastal cliffs, shrines of Poseidon rise» (μεστὴ δ' ἐστὶν ἡ γῆ πᾶσα ἀρτεμισίων τε καὶ ἀφροδισίων καὶ νυμφαίων ἐν ἄλσεσιν ἀνθέων πλέως τὸ πολὺ διὰ τὴν εὐυδρίαν, συχνὰ δὲ καὶ ἐρμεία ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς, ποσειδία δ' ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀκταῖς) [5, p. 488–489].

In the ancient world, reverence for ancestors and the forces of nature was an inseparable part of daily life. Families offered sacrifices to gods who presided over birth, maturation, and agriculture, and during travels, they readily accepted local rituals and the names of foreign deities. The Greeks had no formal word for "tolerance," yet there is no doubt that respect for outsiders and their traditions manifested even then. A striking example is an episode from the Iliad: after killing the Trojan hero Hector, Achilles dishonors his body but ultimately agrees to return it to his father, the old king Priam. In this encounter, enemies recognize the unity of human nature: pity and understanding overcome hostility, demonstrating early roots of religious and ethnic tolerance [6, p. 507]. This episode illustrates that even amidst the bloodshed of war, the Greeks valued human compassion, even toward an enemy. In the ancient mindset, "intolerance" lay in the inability or unwillingness to accept the existence of other cults, rules, and values. In literature of the time – such as Greek tragedies – it often manifested as conflicts between gods or between humans and gods due to the refusal to acknowledge foreign divinities and sacred rites.

Sophocles' Antigone offers a renewed understanding of the clash between human law and unwritten divine mandates. This example highlights the painful consequences of an arrogant belief in the exclusive righteousness

of one's own traditions. The drama, written around 442 BCE, reflects not only the mythological conflict between Antigone and King Creon of Thebes but also a broader philosophical question about the relationship between law and morality. Sophocles demonstrates that adhering strictly to established norms without considering ethical principles can lead to tragic consequences for both rulers and the state. Thus, Antigone symbolizes devotion to familial duty and the higher laws of the gods, while Creon defends the principles of state order. At the core of their conflict lies the question: who holds true authority – human laws or eternal, sacred obligations

This tragedy was especially relevant to Athenian democracy in the 5th century BCE, when ideas of personal freedom, civic responsibility, and state order were actively debated. Sophocles masterfully shows that absolute power, based solely on one of these aspects, leads to destruction.

In antiquity, when multiple gods and rituals coexisted, intolerance took the form of an uncompromising stance toward "foreign" beliefs and rites, sometimes dictated by fear of losing power or influence. Ancient thought emphasizes that ignoring the sacred rights of others leads to social discord and inevitably results in a tragic outcome.

Between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE, in the eastern Aegean cities, Ionian thinkers emerged as the first to critically examine traditional Greek myths and rituals. They pointed out that every society attributes human characteristics to its gods and questioned the veracity of commonly accepted religious beliefs. These new ideas created tension between philosophers and proponents of popular religion, sometimes escalating into outright intolerance. However, they also contributed to an awareness of religious plurality and laid the foundation for future discussions on tolerance in the Greco-Roman world.

Herodotus was among the first to compare different religious customs that he encountered during his travels across the regions conquered by the Persian Empire. In his writings, he emphasized that all beliefs are fundamentally equal, thus reflecting a characteristic Greek inclination toward religious synthesis and tolerance. At the same time, influenced by the Sophists, Herodotus maintained a belief in the real existence of divine forces, while simultaneously doubting that humans could ever fully comprehend their essence: «Divine stories that I have heard, I do not seek to recount, except only their names, since I believe that all people are equal in knowledge of the gods. However, if I do mention something from them, it is only because otherwise, it would be impossible to present my account» (τὰ μὲν νυν θεία τῶν ἀπηγημάτων οἷα ἤκουον οὐκ εἰμὶ πρόθυμος ἐξηγέεσθαι, ἕξω ἢ τὰ οὐνόματα αὐτῶν μόνον, νομίζων πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἴσον περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπίστασθαι: τὰ δ' ἂν ἐπιμνησθῆω αὐτῶν, ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου ἐξαναγκαζόμενος ἐπιμνησθήσομαι) [7, p. 98].

The verb ἐξηγήεσθαι (*exēgēesthai*) means “to recount, to interpret,” from which the term “exegesis” later emerged. νομίζω (*nomízō*) means “to consider, to recognize, to respect traditions.” In Ancient Greek, this word carried not only an intellectual nuance (“to suppose”) but also a ritual meaning. It indicated traditional beliefs and religious norms that a person honored. Here, it may signify Herodotus’ respectful attitude toward the idea that every individual has the right to their religious views. πάντας ἀνθρώπους (*pántas anthrṓpous*) means “all people.” This universal scope emphasizes the idea of equality, regardless of origin or culture. ἐπίστασθαι (*epístasthai*) means “to know, to understand.” In combination with the previous words, this expression can be understood as an acknowledgment that people may comprehend the divine differently, but their knowledge is equally valid.

Thucydides, continuing Herodotus’ approach and almost never mentioning the gods (Thucydides ignores religion except for its influence on political decisions), emphasized the human factor and took a critical stance on religious justifications for politics—from the superstitions of the general Nicias to the cynical justification of Athenian aggression in the Melian Dialogue. In doing so, he laid the foundations for a skeptical approach to matters of faith, which later became an important part of the Hellenistic and Roman intellectual tradition [3, p. 43]. In the 5th century BCE, Greek society began to develop a new understanding of religion: it started to be seen as a social and cultural phenomenon that distinguished one people from another. Thucydides condemned the Athenians for the religious hysteria that erupted around Alcibiades [7, p. 345], pointing out that political and religious prejudices could lead to injustice.

The Sophists, teachers of rhetoric, leaned toward a critical view of traditional beliefs. Protagoras proposed the thesis of relativism: «Man is the measure of all things: of things that exist, that they exist; and of things that do not exist, that they do not exist» (πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν) [8, p.152].

Thus, Protagoras tells us that human perception determines what exists and what does not. He asserted that truth is relative and depends on individual experience rather than immutable absolutes. This view stood in opposition to traditional conceptions of the world, where objective truth existed independently of human perception. Regarding the gods, he maintained an agnostic position, claiming that he could not say whether they existed or not. He explained this by arguing that humans lack the means to gain knowledge on such matters and that human life is too short to arrive at a definitive answer.

For the Sophist Hippias, the most important aspect was the natural kinship between people rather than the laws and customs established by society. He emphasized that all people are connected by nature rather than by artificial norms adopted in specific cities or states. This perspective challenged rigid social

boundaries and contributed to the development of ideas about intercultural tolerance and equality. Critics viewed religion as a tool of governance. In his works, the gods are depicted not as real entities but as an artificial invention created to control people. He suggested that belief in the gods was designed as a means of keeping mortals in obedience by instilling in them the fear of punishment for their transgressions. The playwright Euripides also explored the theme of doubt in divine influence. In his tragedies, characters often justify their actions by referring to divine intervention, but the text itself allows the audience to question this notion. For example, human desires and passions may be attributed to the influence of goddesses, although in reality, they are manifestations of human nature.

Thus, the philosophy of the Sophists and the tragic poetry of the time shaped a new worldview in which human beings became the central figures of knowledge, and traditional notions of gods and laws were subject to reconsideration.

Socrates, although considered a believer, urged the Athenians to impartially analyze moral and religious norms. In his search for truth, he questioned dogmas based solely on tradition and demanded rational justification for established views. Plato dedicated a significant part of his early dialogues to distinguishing Socrates from the sophists, asserting that Socrates always acted for the benefit of Athens. In the dialogues *Apology* and *Euthyphro*, Plato emphasized this criticism of traditional beliefs, highlighting the importance of personal reflection and dialogue in developing genuine understanding – something that later contributed to the formation of a culture open to diverse beliefs. Similarly, Empedocles, despite his strong individual style and charisma, actively opposed tyranny and oligarchy in 5th-century Acragas, advocating democratic values and political equality. Criticizing the luxurious and oppressive tendencies prevalent in his society, Empedocles sought to protect civic freedoms and liberty, emphasizing a shared philosophical commitment with Socrates and Plato to rational discourse and the preservation of ethical standards against authoritarian threats [9, p. 83].

The ideas of the sophists, Socrates, Plato, and their contemporary dramatists laid the foundations for a broader perspective on the nature of faith and human society. Their calls for a rational assessment of conventional views and the recognition of the "common kinship" of people formed the early premises of tolerance in the ancient world.

Plato assigned the Delphic oracle the task of regulating temple rituals and sacrifices (*Republic* 4.427b–c). At the same time, he opposed private cults, prohibiting the establishment of home shrines (*Laws* 10.910d); disobedience to this prescription entailed severe punishment, up to the death penalty for "impure" worship. This intolerance can be interpreted either as Plato's genuine

belief in the punitive power of the gods or as an attempt to maintain order in the state through centralized control over religious practices. Ultimately, his "ideal" community resembles the Greek polis of the 4th century BCE but with a stricter system of governance, where even the legislator is subject to a supreme body (the Nocturnal Council) to ensure stability and a unified religious order.

Demosthenes (384–322 BCE), the greatest orator, often exploited the prejudices of the crowd to discredit his political opponents. In his famous speech *On the Crown* (Περὶ στεφάνου), he ridicules his rival Aeschines for participating in mystery rituals with his mother. According to Demosthenes, Aeschines recited liturgies, mixed libations, clothed initiates in animal skins, and even waved snakes while shouting sacred formulas: "Εὐοὶ Σάβοι!" and "Γύες Ἄττις!" The orator particularly emphasized the comical insignificance of the "reward" for such rituals – wine-soaked pastries, rusks, and raisin buns – implying their "deceptive and indecent nature." This episode illustrates how mockery and bias against non-traditional cults could serve as political weapons and reflects the limited tolerance for alternative beliefs in ancient society.

Ancient religious tolerance was largely based on the ideas of Hellenistic philosophy, especially Stoicism. The Stoics argued that all beliefs lead to a single *logos* that unites humanity. This gave rise to cosmopolitan notions of a unified human community and provided a justification for Roman religious tolerance. The Stoics emphasized that the gods had no need to intervene in human affairs, as a universal *logos* existed; the Epicureans acknowledged the gods but believed they had no influence on earthly life. Skeptics doubted the human mind's ability to comprehend the divine.

In contrast earlier Greeks, who focused on ritual worship and identifying similarities between the gods of different peoples, Hellenistic philosophers shifted the emphasis to morality and reason. Philosophers did not entirely reject religion but sharply criticized superstition. Thus, Theophrastus, in *Characters*, mocks a man who runs to soothsayers after every dream and drags his entire family to Orphic rites. From the perspective of Stoics and Epicureans, such fears were a sign of ignorance of natural laws.

Unlike the Stoics and Cynics, the Epicureans preached personal autonomy and withdrawal from public life. Epicurus taught: The gods exist but do not interfere in human affairs; Fear of the gods is illogical, and religion is imposed by society; A person should avoid politics and live among friends in the "Garden of Epicurus"; The Epicureans did not call for the destruction of cults but disregarded them, viewing them as social rituals.

In Rome, it became customary to accept new cults as long as they did not disrupt state affairs and recognized the imperial cult. At the same time, monotheism (Judaism and Christianity), which refused to worship the emperor, was seen as a threat to loyalty, provoking persecution. Thus, we see that

Roman tolerance was selective: pagan beliefs were permitted, while religions that rejected state rituals were persecuted. The idea of the common good and *humanitas* developed under the influence of Stoicism. Seneca, referencing the Roman playwright Terence in *Letters to Lucilius*, emphasized that people are parts of "one great body" and have a duty to help each other. These ideas formed the foundation of Roman law and significantly influenced the European tradition of humanism.

Hellenistic philosophy contributed to the formation of tolerance, recognizing different forms of religiosity as cultural practices rather than absolute truths, and laid the foundation for the idea of common humanity in Roman society. However, actual Roman "tolerance" was limited by political interests: those who refused to honor the emperor often faced persecution. This internal contradiction later led to intense religious struggles in late antiquity.

The process of religious syncretization in the Roman Empire and its consequences for religious tolerance and human rights is a crucial topic for understanding the development of a multicultural society. Syncretism promoted religious tolerance by allowing different religious groups to coexist and interact, creating conditions for peaceful cohabitation and mutual cultural and religious influence. Religious conflicts could also be caused by social and economic factors. For example, social inequality, economic hardships, or political instability could lead to conflicts between different religious groups or between these groups and the state. In such periods, religion could become a symbol of social discontent or a tool for mobilizing the masses [10, p. 43-44].

Marcus Aurelius (2nd century CE), a Roman emperor and Stoic, states in *Meditations* (Med. 4.4) that the common ability to reason forms a unified Logos, making all people fellow citizens of one universe. This approach helped maintain tolerance and harmony within such a vast and diverse state.

The Hellenistic period confronted Greeks and Romans with the reality of religious diversity. Previously, foreigners in the Greek world were mostly considered outsiders or slaves, but after conquests, Greco-Roman power found itself ruling entire cultures with centuries-old traditions, temples, and cults. To maintain stability, the administration sought to extend familiar Greek syncretism to new conditions, ultimately leading to tighter control over local religious communities. This is how the Roman imperial cult emerged and new forms of religious integration in the Mediterranean took shape. In the Greco-Roman world, philosophy served as a theoretical support for the young ruling elite, helping govern a multinational empire. Philosophical schools unified ideas about morality, social ethics, divine reason, and the meaning of life, contributing to the creation of a unified political and spiritual system.

Conclusion

The analysis of religious tolerance in the ancient world shows that it was not an immutable principle but depended on political, social, and philosophical dynamics. In Greek city-states, freedom of religion developed in the context of growing intellectual pluralism, yet it remained embedded in the system of civic identity and collective rituals. In the Roman Empire, tolerance had a pragmatic character: it allowed for a diversity of cults as long as they did not contradict state ideology and the imperial cult. Hellenistic philosophy and legal traditions contributed to a rethinking of the boundaries of religious freedom but did not eliminate mechanisms for suppressing dissenters. Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Skepticism proposed models of critical attitudes toward faith, yet religious institutions retained their social and political function. This dualism – between free thought and normative restrictions – became an integral part of the ancient legacy, influencing subsequent eras. Modern scholarship also calls for a reconsideration of traditional approaches to classical studies, emphasizing the necessity of decolonial critique and a rethinking of Antiquity through critical methodologies. In particular, highlights the importance of transcending traditional Eurocentric narratives and advocates integrating broader and more pluralistic perspectives into the study of antiquity [11, p. 157-158]. This approach can serve as a basis for further studies of tolerance and religious pluralism in antiquity, taking into account contemporary critical methodologies.

Hellenistic philosophy and legal traditions contributed to a rethinking of the boundaries of religious freedom but did not eliminate mechanisms for suppressing dissenters. Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Skepticism proposed models of critical attitudes toward faith, yet religious institutions retained their social and political function. This dualism – between free thought and normative restrictions – became an integral part of the ancient legacy, influencing subsequent eras.

The experience of antiquity demonstrates that religious tolerance is not a natural state of society but the result of a complex balance between tradition, power, and intellectual development. Even during periods of maximum expansion of spiritual freedom, it remained conditional, subordinated to state interests and social norms. This historical precedent shows that religious tolerance is always intertwined with issues of power, identity, and control, and its limits are determined not so much by moral principles as by the dynamics of social and political change.

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ФІЛОСОФІЯ РЕЛІГІЙНОЇ ТОЛЕРАНТНОСТІ В АНТИЧНІЙ ДУМЦІ

Резюме

Стаття присвячена дослідженню еволюції релігійної толерантності в античному світі, аналізуючи вплив політичних структур, соціальних традицій та філософських концепцій на формування меж свободи віросповідання. Особлива увага приділяється механізмам взаємодії між державою та релігією, а також впливу правових норм на сприйняття релігійного різноманіття.

Доведено, що у грецьких полісах релігійні ритуали були невід'ємною частиною громадянської ідентичності, сприяючи формуванню уявлень про прийнятність різних культів. Філософські питання, пов'язані зі свободою думки та критичним осмисленням віри, знаходили відображення в працях мислителів, які досліджували природу божественного та його взаємозв'язок із людським життям. Наприклад, Ксенофан критикував антропоморфні уявлення про богів, тоді як Протагор ставив під сумнів можливість пізнання божественного, що стимулювало дискусії про релігійну терпимість.

Обґрунтовано, що стародавні історики, такі як Геродот і Полібій, фіксували динаміку суспільного ставлення до релігійних нововведень, відзначаючи як випадки прийняття, так і відторгнення нових культів. У римському контексті досліджуються стратегії імперії щодо адаптації до релігійного різноманіття, які поєднували елементи інтеграції та контролю. Римська політика "інклюзивного синкретизму" дозволяла включати божества підкорених народів до пантеону, що сприяло зміцненню імперської єдності.

Виявлено, що правові та соціальні механізми, які визначали межі релігійної толерантності, мали значний вплив на трансформацію релігійної політики в період пізньої античності. Едикт Міланський 313 року, виданий Костянтином Великим, легалізував християнство, що стало важливим кроком до визнання релігійного плюралізму. Однак, згодом, із зростанням впливу християнства, спостерігалось обмеження традиційних язичницьких культів, що свідчить про складність і неоднозначність процесів релігійної толерантності в античності.

Таким чином, стаття надає комплексний аналіз факторів, які впливали на формування та трансформацію релігійної толерантності в античному суспільстві, підкреслюючи взаємозв'язок між політичними, соціальними та філософськими аспектами цього явища.

Ключові слова: античність, філософія, толерантність, релігійна толерантність, свобода віросповідання, греко-римський світ.

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