



Save Ancient Studies Alliance

Summer 2024 Teaching Ancient Studies: Continuing Education Reading Group

Sexuality and Power in the Ancient World

Led by Yentl Love

Introduction to Reading Group:

This reading group will aim to discuss how Queer Theory has enabled a radical re-evaluation of the LGBTQIA+ community alongside other minority groups, through both the study and teaching of Ancient World History. This course will first introduce participants to the main concepts of Queer Theory, in particular the central contradictory approaches of Constructivism vs Essentialism, and Queer Theory's discussions of the societal power imbalance. Subsequently, this will be applied to the Ancient World, taking the participants through diverse historical objects and literature, from Ancient Egypt tombs, to Ancient Greek pottery, and Near Eastern texts.

Each session will focus on a specific aspect of Queerness found in the Ancient World, and will be discussed alongside diverse and potentially contradictory modern scholarship, ancient artefacts and literature, and supporting aspects of Queer Theory. While the study of evidence of LGBTQIA+ identities will remain the focus, the sessions will also look at the wide breadth of inclusive Queer Theories, including studies of ethnic and racial minorities, and disabled lives. Participants will approach key ancient artefacts, including sculpture, pottery, reliefs, and tombs, alongside ancient literature, and see how an original scholarly interpretation has been developed through employing alternative consideration from a Queer Theoretical perspective. In particular, the challenging of heteronormative and cis-normative assumptions of historical identities, and the development of our awareness of identities beyond the binary, which have since impacted how we view key artefacts from the past. The class will end with a group discussion on how these topics can be brought to the classroom, and how we can sympathetically and inclusively encourage diverse conversations.

Reading Group Objectives:

This course will enable participants to gain an understanding of how diverse the ancient world was, and how we can promote these findings in both research and the classroom in order to champion radical inclusivity, and challenge the historic exclusivity of Classics. Participants will be able to state the differing approaches of Queer Theory, and how this can impact the way we view history, particularly in terms of personal relation to the past, and the 'Queer Ancestor'. They will also be able to discuss how scholarship has developed over the last twenty years in regards to the inclusion of Queer Theory within Classics and Archaeology, and the reassessment of key artefacts and texts. Finally they will be able to discuss the significance of promoting awareness of the diversity of ancient history in research, the classroom, and beyond.

Your SASA Educational Ambassador:

Yentl Love

Completing a PhD in History at the University of Potsdam

Google Classroom:

During our weekly Zoom meetings, we'll come together to discuss our readings and delve into the topic. We will also use Google Classroom to provide easy access to reading materials, resources, and facilitate ongoing discussions through open forums. This platform will also be where participants submit their assignments.

Dates:

Monday @ 11:00 am EDT

- Session 1: June 17
- Session 2: June 24
- Session 3: July 1
- Session 4: July 8
- Session 5: July 15

Week 1 Queer Theory and Ancient Sexuality

This week we will discuss the title of this reading group, Sexuality and Power, and how this relates to the main aims of Queer Theory. We will discuss together some key scholars, then look at how this can challenge our interpretation of the Ancient World through a study of the Ancient Egyptian fifth dynasty tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep in Lower Egypt, historically identified as twins, despite poses of kissing and embracing. We will discuss the politics of history writing, and how we can diversify our classrooms through the inclusion of 'Queer' Ancient History.



Readings:

- Blackmore (2011) '[How to Queer the Past without Sex: Queer Theory, Feminisms, and the Archaeology of Identity](#)'
- Section of Warner's (1993) '[Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Policy and Social Theory](#)'
- Section of Rupp's (1999) '[A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America](#)'
- Reeder's (2000) '[Same-Sex desire, conjugal constructs, and the tomb of Niankhkhnun and Khnumhotep](#)'

Week 2 Lesbian Visibility in Antiquity

The second session will look at examples of Queer female sexuality through the ancient world, with discussion on why evidence may have been lost, and the significance of the discussions. We will also have a conversation in the class about the potential importance of highlighting lesbian stories and identities, and what this may bring to the broader study. Particular attention will be given to the Ancient Egyptian statue of Idet and Ruiu (1480-1390 BCE), Ancient Greek poetry including Sappho and Anacreon's fragment 358, Greek pottery, Late Roman poetry by Luxorius, and Egyptian curse tablets invoking homosexual love between women.

Readings:

- Boehringer's (2013) '[Female Homoeroticism](#)'
- Boehringer's (2021) '[Female Homosexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome](#)' (For further reading, whichever section interests you)

Week 3 Ancient Evidence for Transgender Lives

In week three, we will study how we can find evidence of gender non-conformity in the ancient world, and to what extent we can use the terms 'transgender' or 'non-binary' to discuss these. Articles by Mowat, Northrop, and Merkley will be key to this discussion, which will involve the study of Cypriot Aphrodite, Ovid's discussion of Caeneus in the *Metamorphoses*, and Apuleius' text the *Golden Ass*, in which the Galli are discussed in some depth. We will have a group discussion on the potential challenges of discussing gender identity in the Ancient World, as well as how we can frame and encourage these debates in a positive and inclusive manner.

Readings:

- Mowat (2021) '[Don't be a Drag, Just be a Priest: The Clothing and Identity of the Galli of Cybele in the Roman Republic and Empire](#)'
- Merkley's (2024) '[Writing trans histories with an ethics of care, while reading gender in imperial Roman literature](#)'
- Northrop's (2020) '[Caeneus and Heroic \(Trans\)Masculinity in Ovid's Metamorphoses](#)'

Week 4 Broadening Studies of Power in the Ancient World

In the fifth week we will discuss how broad Queer Theoretical approaches can be, taking into account discussions of Queer 'Crip Theory' and Disabled Bodies in Ancient History. We will discuss the 2020 article 'Why Does Classical Reception Need Disability Studies?' by Silverblank and Ward, and talk about how this approach can support our teaching of the Ancient World. This will further explored through discussions of Ancient Near Eastern cuneiform tablets, alongside the Sumerian myth of Enki and Ninmah, evidence from the Ancient Egyptian tombs and reliefs of Seneb, Periankhw and Khnumhotep, archaeological evidence from sanctuaries of Asklepios, and an ancient Greek vase by the Carpenter painter.

Readings:

- Silverblank and Ward (2020) ['Why Does Classical Reception Need Disability Studies?'](#)

Week 5 Monstrous Sexuality

The final meeting will explore a different aspect of power and sexuality in the ancient body through a discussion of how gender and sexual deviance is often contextualised through mythology surrounding 'monsters' in the ancient world. The session will discuss specifically how Tiamat, Scylla, Medusa, the Minotaur, and others, are used to represent societal demonisation of the 'other' in terms of gender and sexuality, and to warn against sexual transgressions.

Readings:

- Baker's (2010) ['Monstrous fairytales: Towards an écriture queer'](#)
- Excerpt of Miller's (2017) ['Monstrous Sexuality: Variations on the Vagina Dentata'](#) (** See Content Warning on resources page **)

Culminating Assignment:

Instructions for this assignment can be found in your Google Classroom under Coursework.

Certificates of Completion:

The following criteria must be met by participants in order to receive a certificate of completion:

- Complete culminating assignment
- Attended all 5 live class discussions

* If you are seeking continuing education/professional development credits SASA recommends that you check with your school district, continuing education committee, or other relevant authority in advance to ensure you receive the proper credit and advancement for your coursework. Save Ancient Studies Alliance does not guarantee acceptance by your school, district, or licensing authority.