

Save Ancient Studies Alliance

Summer 2023 Texts-in-Translation Reading Group

Queer Lives and Loves in Ancient History

"Queer Lives and Loves in Ancient History" will use Queer Theory to explore and uncover evidence of LGBT+ lives in the Ancient World. The reading group will cover a variety of ancient Greek, Latin, and Near Eastern literature, recognizing the diversity of the Ancient World beyond the Mediterranean, and hypothesizing about the lived experiences beyond the Western norms of fixed sexual and gendered binary identities that have emerged only within the last few hundred years. The reading groups will each assume no specialist knowledge of the period, and so will begin with a contextualisation of the time and place in which these texts were created. We will also discuss the potential challenges of applying modern theory to ancient texts, and how using the 'Resisting Reader' approach can provide insightful challenges to historic interpretations of classical texts. In a time when we see transphobic and homophobic legislation and hate speech on the rise, it is both powerful and important to uncover and explore evidence of LGBT+ lives in Antiquity, reminding the world that Queer lives and loves have always existed.

Your SASA Educational Ambassadors:

Yentl Love (Pronouns: She/Her)

Currently completing a PhD in Ancient History at the University of Potsdam, Germany.

love@uni-potsdam.de

Twitter: @ QueerClassicist // Instagram: @ TheQueerClassicist

[Session Recordings Playlist - Youtube \(Private\)](#)

[Reading Group Folder Link](#)

Week 1 (Queering the Hero in the Ancient Near East)

Beginning in the Ancient Near East, we will use the Epic of Gilgamesh to explore the relationship between the titular hero, and the character Enkidu, and drawing parallels between other heroic pairings in Ancient Near Eastern texts, and through history.

The primary source for this week's discussion group is the dream sequence from the Epic of Gilgamesh, which can be found in the Week 1 Resources folder. Alternatively you can access the entire Epic for free at the link below:

<http://www.aina.org/books/eog/eog.pdf>

The main secondary source we will be using to support our discussion is:

When Heroes Love: The Ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David (Susan Ackerman, 2005)

From page 53-63, which is available on Google Books for free. I've also added a PDF to the Google Drive page to access in which just contains the essential knowledge for this week's discussion, and is a bit shorter.

If you want to read more- but this is absolutely not necessary- I would recommend this text:

The Search for Identity in the Epic of Gilgamesh (Elizabeth Williamsen, 1997) – available for free through Google Scholar.

Unfortunately the majority of texts on this topic are behind paywalls, and I can't find a way to provide them for free! But if you are able to access these through a library or another way, I'd recommend both *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature* (Gwendolyn Leick, 1994) and *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* (Martti Nissinen, 1998).

Week 2 (Re-Queering Bacchus)

This week will focus on Euripides' depiction of Bacchus in *Bacchae*, and how Queer Theory may support a non-binary gendered interpretation of the god. This reading will be supported by further excerpts from Nonnos' *Dionysiaka*. We will discuss how aspects such as clothing, hair, and appearance were used to express gender in the Ancient World, and the difference between Bacchus and Pentheus' fates.

We'll be studying a variety of passages from Euripides' *Bacchae*, specifically lines: 343-355, 450-460, 477-478, 524-525, 810-860, and 915-945, as well as a passage from Nonnos' *Dionysiaka* (14.154-167). Both of them can be found in the Week 2 folder, or you can read them online at

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0092%3Acard%3D1>

<https://topostext.org/work/529>

We will also be supporting our discussion with passages from 'A Cultural History of Hair, Volume 1: A Cultural History of Hair in Antiquity' and 'A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in Antiquity'. Both of these are challenging to find online, so I've uploaded specific passages in the 'secondary sources' section in the Week 2 folder.

Week 3 (Plato's *Symposium* and Ancient Sexualities)

Week 3 will begin with a discussion of Plato's *Symposium*, using the character Aristophane's account of the origins of different sexualities as a starting point, before moving into discussions of pederasty and what the later passages suggest about the existence of adult same-sex relationships.

In this reading group we'll be focussing on quite a few sections of the dialogues in Plato's *Symposium*, so we won't be using any secondary sources in our reading (although of course if you want to do extra reading around the topic, feel free to bring any thoughts or research to our discussions!) We'll be using this open access translation, but you can find the exact parts of the text we'll be discussing together in the Drive folder under 'Week 3'.

<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/symposium.html>

Week 4 (Reading Transgender Lives in Lucian)

In week 4 we will explore Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, specifically the passage between Leana and Clonarium. The group will discuss why Lucian may specify that Megilla/Megillos originates from Lesbos, taking a brief interlude into Sappho's reception in Ancient Rome, before exploring how this passage may be read through the lenses of both homosexual and transgender identities and Experiences.

You can find a free translation of the passage at the link below, we'll be using the discussion between Clonarium and Leaina (page 24-26), but of course feel free to read more of the text around it!

<https://www.globalgreybooks.com/mimes-of-the-courtesans-ebook.html>

If you do choose to read more however, a brief **content warning** - the wider text discusses physical assault, violence against women, and sexual trauma.

The passage we will be discussing however does not contain any of this content, although there is potential dead-naming of a character if we are choosing to read them as transgender.

In the folder for this week I've also uploaded a link to an article discussing 'gender-bending' in this passage. It's quite a long article (20 pages) so no need to read it before, but if you want some more surrounding knowledge this might be useful!

Week 5 (Discovering Queerness in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*)

I can't believe it's already our last week! This week we'll be exploring two different depictions of divine intervention resulting in a change of gender, that of Caenis/Caeneus and of Iphis, both within Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. You can find the full text online for free at <https://www.theoi.com/Text/OvidMetamorphoses1.html> - our specific texts are in Book 9 Chapter 7, and Book 12 Chapter 3. I also have put a document in the 'Week 5 Resources' folder which contains just the sections we'll be looking at, if you want a slightly easier format to navigate!

I've also included some optional secondary readings around the topic. There's a PDF in the Resources folder called 'Caeneus and Heroic (Trans)Masculinity in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', which is a really interesting article by Charlotte Northrop, as well as 'Reframing Iphis and Caeneus: Trans Narratives and Socio-Linguistic Gendering in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*' by J.L. Watson. I would also recommend the chapter 'Gender Amender: Sex-Changing and Transgender Identities in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*' by Anna Everett Beek - it's in an edited book called *Invisible Cultures: Historical and Archaeological Perspectives*, but if you search the chapter name on Google Scholar it's available free to access.

Please don't feel you have read all of these resources - they are only optional if you feel interested in looking into the topic more before we meet! Feel free to choose any or none at all to read through - the primary text is what's the focus here!

Also, we have a number of **content warnings** in this week's resources.

There will be brief mentions of sexual assault, as well as homophobic and transphobic rhetoric.