The Ruling Passion: The Erotics of Politics in the Ancient World

Organized by Andrew Scholtz (SUNY Binghamton) and Mark Munn (Pennsylvanian State University)

The past few decades have seen a great deal of work done in the sociology and politics of ancient erōs: how the social and the political shaped conceptions of desire in the ancient world. Recently, though, the terms have been reversed as scholars like Wohl (Love among the Ruins, 2002), Ludwig (Eros and Polis, 2002), Munn (The Mother of the Gods, Athens, and the Tyranny of Asia, 2006), and Scholtz (Concordia Discors: Eros and Dialogue in Classical Athenian Literature, 2007) have begun to ask questions about the erotics and gendering of politics and ideology: how erōs inflected political discourse, how political power could be viewed as an expression of erōs. The organizers of this panel seek to broaden this discussion and to extend it across the full range of Greek and Roman antiquity, and to include within its purview non-verbal modes of expression (e.g., the pictorial and plastic arts, architecture).

One theme to emerge in recent work on Athens has to do with the tension between desire’s productive/creative and destructive/destabilizing effects: on the one hand, its power to forge community, to cement civic bonds, to galvanize willing consent; on the other hand, its capacity to fuel overweening ambition, to thwart rational deliberation, to threaten civic chaos. Where else, though, does passionate desire charge the political with tensions like those argued for democratic Athens? Does the evidence suggest congruence between Greece and Rome, between earlier and later antiquity, in this regard? Or do the erotics of power, ambition, leadership, and patriotism change in ways that are distinctive to particular cultures, to particular moments, within the broader sweep of classical Mediterranean history?
The organizers solicit submissions from scholars pursuing a variety of approaches, from the positivist to the post-structuralist, from evolutionary studies to feminist and queer studies. They ask, though, that proposals avoid purely theoretical or methodological foci. Possible topics include: erotically inflected propaganda, euergetism, political satire, historiography, political theory; the erotics of tyranny; erotically charged images carrying political meaning; politically inflected cult to the deities of sex.

Abstracts should be submitted as hard copy, double spaced, 450–750 words, parenthetical references rather than footnotes, condensed citations rather than full bibliography. Include word-count at end. Otherwise, follow instructions found Page 6 of this Program Guide. Send two copies of Form D and five copies of an abstract to: American Philological Association, University of Pennsylvania, 292 Logan Hall, 249 S. 36th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-63. Receipt deadline: February 2, 2007. Each abstract will be anonymously reviewed by at least two outside referees; submitters will be notified promptly of the status of their papers. We especially encourage submissions from younger scholars.