

**IRIS**  
**THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LAMBDA CLASSICAL CAUCUS**  
**WINTER 2008**

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### Rehak & Winkler Prize Winners

**Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos** of Florida Atlantic University was awarded the Lambda Classical Caucus' annual Paul Rehak Award for his article "Beyond Sex: The Poetics and Politics of Pederasty in Tibullus 1.4," *Phoenix* 61 (2007): 1-20. The Rehak Award honors the best article or book chapter pertaining to the LCC mission published within the past three years.



Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos

The John J. Winkler Memorial Prize is granted each year to "the best undergraduate or graduate essay in any risky or marginal field of classical studies." This year's winners were **Alexander Dressler**, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Washington, for his paper entitled "The Sophist and the Swarm: Platonism and Feminism in Achilles Tatius"; and **Michael Pelch**, a Greek and Latin major at Oberlin, for his paper "The Danger of Drag in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae*."

### LCC Panel 2008

This year's LCC panel, "Cults and Queer Identities in Classical Antiquity," was organized by **Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos** and **John P. Wood**. The panel featured the following papers: **Aristoula Georgiadou's** "Reconstructing' a Cult of Eros: Rites of Passage at the Festival of the Erotidaea"; **Lauri Reitzammer's** "Stairway to Heaven: Women on Ladders at the Adonia"; **Marsha McCoy's** "The Cult of Priapus and Queer Identities in Petronius' Satyricon"; and **Mark Masterson's** "Queer Spaces in Third- and Fourth-Century CE Traditional Religious Practice." **Anthony P. Corbeill** was the respondent.

### LCC/WCC Grad Cocktail Hour

This year marked the first joint LCC/WCC graduate student cocktail hour, organized by **Sarah Levin-Richardson** (Graduate Student Representative of the LCC) and **Alexander Dressler** (Graduate Student Representative of the WCC). A smashing success, the event drew a large crowd and attracted nine new student members (welcome!). Based on graduate student feedback, Sarah and Konstantinos hope to organize a graduate student/faculty roundtable for next year's APA/AIA on "Queer Theory in Classics."

#### Lambda Classical Caucus Officers

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## LCC/WCC Party

In conjunction with the LCC panel, the theme for this year's LCC/WCC party was "Cult Figures Ancient and Modern." Check it out! (photos thanks to Ruby Blondell)



Siegfried & Roy



Warren Jeffs family



Wonder Woman



Mithras devotee





King Tut



Jim Jones

## Book Review

Richard J. King, *Desiring Rome: Male Subjectivity and Reading Ovid's Fasti*.  
Columbus: Ohio State University, 2006  
**Phyllis Culham**

K.'s *Desiring Rome* manages to stand with a foot on each of two ladders and to hold the pose elegantly. On the one side is the discourse of cultural studies with rungs or stages consisting of Bourdieu through Lacan on poetry and film to Eve Sedgwick on male homosocial relations. On the other side are ancient texts including, obviously, Ovid's *Fasti*, as well as the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae*, plus, to the reviewer's delight, epigraphical *fasti* and the traces of the Augustan *horologium*.

The short but dynamic volume even manages to combine the consensus that Ovid's *Fasti* is an integral, complexly yet coherently shaped work with a new emphasis on the use of discontinuity and brokenness in the text to critique Roman male homosocial relationships and even Roman male identity. The Roman calendar, according to K., is Ovid's great, book-long, Lacanian "screen," the apparently traditional interest of an elite citizen from behind which Ovid can safely comment on shifting power among Roman males and even on the state of the cosmos.

The reviewer confesses that she expected to have to "put up with" a lot of Lacanian jargon to get to what she, in her stick-in-the-mud way, considered "the good parts," which, in her view, ought to contain a lot of rocks and mathematical tables. Chapter One starts right out as a tour de force with rocks (photograph from Degraffi of the *Fasti Amiterni*) in a short, amazingly clear, yet complete explanation for the more typical reader of this volume of Roman calendars as inevitable sites of religious and political competition. The reviewer (an epigrapher and political historian) would predictably like to have seen more of the late Republic in that chapter, since K. emphasizes the competitive aspect of male homosocial behavior in Rome, and the competition for time as well as space did not start with the empire nor even with Julius Caesar, who gets a paragraph here. The Big Men of the late Republic had been newly armed with Hellenistic kingly practices and contacts, so that some of the imperial-era competition which follows draws from Greek culture as well as Roman and is even more far reaching in ambition and cultural impact than K. projects. (Mitylene, for instance, had already named a month after Pompey.)

Sedgwick and homosociality come into their own in Chapter Two on "Ovid, Germanicus, and Homosocial Desire." Aspects of homosociality here include patronage, friendship, and competition. Vocabulary aside, the reviewer was feeling right at home in well-conceived political history. K. makes an excellent case that Ovid accepts a "'feminine' (trafficked) position" in relationship to Germanicus as patron, albeit via language reflecting the submission of

soldiers and gladiators. The reviewer appreciates this literary light on political and social history but misses excursions into context again: this time into intertextuality. Although Germanicus pervades the book, the reviewer could find no spot at which K. highlights for the literarily minded that Germanicus later translated Aratus who underlies much of the *Fasti*, perhaps in Cicero's translation. It is surely important information that the relationship between Ovid and Germanicus is not simply asymmetric in power but also symmetric in mutual gazing at constellations. It may be that K. understandably does not want to import much of Gee's *Ovid, Aratus, and Augustus*, whose remarkable successes he assumes; yet, if we want to speak of penetration, filling, and male fertility, then this other "homo-textual" literary encounter" is vital context. And behind Germanicus, as it were, is Julius Caesar's own *De Astris*. It surely complicates interpretation of Ovid's feminine pose that he is languishing on turf perhaps staked out by Caesar.

Chapter Three deals with Janus, a favorite of the reviewer who thoroughly enjoyed the frank look at a deity with, as K. notes, two mouths but no anus. The reviewer found herself more out of sorts with Chapter Four and its greater emphasis on the "fantasy screen," terminology which seemed to block light rather than cast it. More light might have been brought to bear with an excursion into potential Ovidian intertextuality with Lucretius, given the multiple sub-chapters on Venus. Ovid seems to the reviewer almost a rejoinder to Lucretius' initial invocation of Venus, in a chronological inversion in which "modernity" precedes, and the younger author reverts to antiquarianism. Surely, to repeat, intertextuality is a sort of penetration and a mixing of substance which leads to a new being.

Chapter Five and Augustus' reorganization of time as well as space produce an amazingly compact yet lucid summary for the literary reader of Augustus' efforts to reign over absolutely everything in all four dimensions and to make an end to competition. The political historian may gripe that fine points are sometimes off (e.g.,

transmission of imperial *cognomina*), but some pretty abstruse material on, literally, marking time is well handled, just as the technical material of Chapter One was.

Chapter Six copes with fathers and patrimony in politically important stories like that of the Fabii against Veii as well as the famous Lucretia legend, and at last we get some contextualizing intertextuality with someone else trying to work through the meaning of Augustus in time: Livy. Not to be missed is the crucial Epilogue, the final elegant demonstration of the brokenness of the *Fasti* and of Ovid.

The reader will have noted by now that the reviewer never wished the book shorter (well, except in the "fantasy" sections) but instead wanted more. (She wonders if K. will be pleasantly surprised or disquieted that his text was so interesting to an epigraphically trained political historian.) That "more" could have included potential intertextuality with Manilius, who seems to have been locked outside with Lucretius. If we are to speak of the *Roman* male gaze, and *Roman* homosociality as opposed to Ovid's personal insecurities and reactions to threats, surely we would want to have recourse to similar texts to compare our readings of certain themes. Lucretius and Manilius should have been allowed in, since their omission reduces the scope and impact of some of K.'s well-taken observations. Julius Caesar and Pompey already believed that they could embed themselves or at least be reflected in the cosmic order itself. One cannot sufficiently emphasize the ambition and scale of Roman male competition. Perhaps such omissions made it easier for K. to maintain his perch on the two ladders, a feat he performed with real grace.

Unfortunately, K. has not been well-served by copy editing at the Press, because the book is replete with odd and disruptive commas apparently resulting from the editor's conviction that commas precede all conjunctions. At one point, Sedgwick herself is reduced to speaking of "homsociality." This technical sloppiness sits oddly with the very useful detailing of the *index locorum*. Clearly the Press' heart is in the right place, and it only needs to follow through.



## Book Review

Matthew B. Roller, *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome: Bodies, Values, and Status*. Princeton: Princeton University, 2006

TammyJo Eckhart

Matthew Roller challenges the standard interpretation and presentation, found in many introductory texts and handbooks about Roman culture and society, of how Romans sat or reclined when they ate. In *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome: Bodies, Values, and Status*, he criticizes the traditional image of men reclining and good or proper women sitting as based on limited evidence and a lack of questioning about the social values underlying this evidence. Instead, using more literary and physical evidence, Roller reveals a complex social meaning behind convivial practices, where reclining indicates a superior status and sitting or standing shows inferior status, based not only on gender roles but also on the social/economic position that one either held or wished to hold in the eyes of others.

Roller identifies three reasons why the traditional model of men reclining and good women sitting does not reveal a true image of how Romans dined. He goes beyond merely identifying these reasons to correct them in his own study. First he states that the traditional image of dining practices is based on a very limited number of texts, when in fact there are hundreds of texts we could examine. While Roller does not discuss all of these texts individually in his study, he does discuss, quote, and translate the words of 48 authors from 200 BC to AD 200. The texts he uses range from drama to history, poetry to prose, offering a very good overview of what many different Romans may have believed and practiced. The *Index Locorum* provides a good guide to the texts Roller uses and thus a good guide to further reading on the subject.

The second reason Roller believes that the traditional model of dining posture is lacking is that it uses only written evidence and not visual evidence. Roller looks at funerary monuments, funerary urns, altars, house plans, and murals from the same four centuries that he investigates in the literary evidence. He includes not only the elite but

also what he calls the “subelite,” which encompasses less-prominent Roman families and also freedmen and freedwomen. Roller argues well that these images are primarily intended to demonstrate the status of their subjects to those visiting either the burial place or the home of the owner.

Roller further believes that the traditional model of dining postures has ignored the link between elite practices and social values. When “subelites” portray themselves dining in the same manner as elites, they are claiming a social value similar to that of elite Romans—regardless of the amount or quality of food or the condition of the dining room. Part of the meaning of the *convivium*, Roller argues, is to connect the ideas of social status, economic status, and *otium*: the ideal elite dining posture indicates a period of freedom from duty and work, a time to relax that marked one’s economic and social standing. Thus, both the elegant dining room and the humble home might show the male head of household reclining in order to demonstrate his ability simply to relax and enjoy the fruit of his labors.

But Roller does not look merely at men. He examines men, women, children, and even slaves in relation to dining practices. The order of who is most likely to recline to dine (and thus signal superiority over others) is what we might expect. Men are most likely to recline, and their sitting or standing signals a social inferiority relative to their host. Women, however, are often shown reclining, especially if they are the subjects of their own funerary monuments. Children’s posture is more related to age and status; younger children are almost always sitting but they recline when they outrank others in the immediate group. Roller mingles slaves throughout the chapters primarily as workers—standing and moving, far from the ideal of relaxing for a meal—or occasionally reclining either for sexual practices or when they are dining only among their peers. Roller argues convincingly that posture, then, is a signal to self and others of what type of experience this meal is—work or leisure, among peers or among people of varied status.

The discussion of sexual practices throughout this study is the weakest component of Roller's argument. The identification of who is free and who is slave is tenuous in the case of women, because Roller offers no clear criteria for identifying them. Is it a matter of looks, dress, jewelry, or physical position of the women shown or discussed? Similarly, children's status as slave or free is unclear, especially on women's funerary monuments, where Roller assumes the children are slaves but does not suppose they have the same sexual function as do slaves on comparable men's monuments. While we should not simply assume that slave children were the objects of sexual desire, we should also not assume they were not so considered by some people. Likewise, Roller assumes on a few occasions that male slaves are sexual objects but does not offer clear and direct evidence for this association beyond the ideal of youthful long-haired male slaves in literature.

Women may often be sexual objects in both literary and visual representations of dining practices in Rome, but Roller's chapter on women strongly argues that this is not simply a matter of women as inferior and men as superior. The visuals he examines are particularly convincing here, as he draws our attention to mutual touching and glances without a clear indication of social status. Of course, this examination also demonstrates the difficulty of distinguishing between free and slave and between upper and lower classes, if those portrayed are not standing during the meal. I think that comparison with frescoes from brothels might have offered a way to compare clothing or practices, but that would have required moving away from the private dining experience into the commercial realm.

Throughout his study, Roller compares written and visual evidence in a complex way, looking not only at the positions of each body but also at the composition of the room, furniture, food, and drinks in order to evaluate the meaning the artist or author was trying to communicate. Yet Roller never offers his interpretation as the definitive one, only as a generalization from particular evidence. This is particularly

humble given that he is drawing upon far more evidence than those scholars he initially criticizes. Roller ends his book with a brief discussion of the difference between a *cena* or *convivium* dining experience and a *comissatio* or drinking party. This appendix takes us away from the discussion of dining position and its social meaning into another example of how the traditional view of Roman practices is skewed.

Roller's deep investigation and use of a wide range of evidence bolster his claims that the standard image of men reclining and good women sitting is far more an elite ideal than a reflection of actual practice. Furthermore, by looking at several economic and social classes Roller demonstrates that non-elites were more interested in mimicking actual elite behavior than ideal elite behavior, strongly suggesting that our literary sources are portraying not a common expectation but the opinions of a few elite men. Drawing upon both written and visual evidence, Roller offers us a more realistic view of how Romans dined and the value of dining posture in helping to create and promote one's image. While *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome: Bodies, Values, and Status* is not as readily accessible to a student or lay audience, it offers historians and classicists a good foundation from which to explore the topic of dining and social values.

## New Books of Interest

James Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love: A New Appraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007.

Caroline Vout, *Power and Eroticism in Imperial Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

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*If you have any news or would like to review a book, please email the Newsletter Editor, Deborah Kamen (dkamen@u.washington.edu).*