

Religion 605
Fall 2008

Religion and the Body in Late Antiquity

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520 Hall of Languages
Office Hours: Mondays 1 - 3

"Cultural conceptualizations of the body, being so merged with the reality of bodily perception and experience, seem uniquely natural and basic. While the body is eminently 'natural,' it is just this perception of naturalness that allows culturally variable concepts of the body to be so fundamentally ingrained in the collective psyche. In fact, images of the body everywhere embody social and cultural form."--Bruce Knauft, Zone 5, 203

"The body is the tangible frame of selfhood in individual and collective experience, providing a constellation of physical signs with the potential for signifying the relations of persons to their contexts."--Jean Comaroff, Zone 5, 203

"The body [is] no longer posited as a fact of nature, a constant and universal reality, but as an entirely problematic notion, a historical category, steeped in imagination, and one which must be deciphered within a particular culture by defining the functions it assumes and the forms it takes on within that culture."--Jean-Pierre Vernant, Zone 3, 20

This course concerns the history of the human body as the history of its modes of construction in a particular historical period, that of late antiquity. Toward the end of acquiring what Michel Foucault has called a "thickened perception of the present," study of late antiquity presents the reader with a variety of ways of constructing the body which continue to inform and to haunt Western culture. Particularly tenacious have been the various ways in which late antique people constructed the body sexually and, conversely, constructed sexuality physically and/or psychologically. Other issues central to the course are late ancient theories of desire (eros) and classical and late ancient constructions of gender.

Requirements

Each week, each of you will write an abstract, not to exceed one page (double-spaced), in which you isolate a determining thesis or argument of the week's reading. Please try to include the ancient material in your statement. You should be prepared to defend your choice of thesis orally in seminar discussions. At the beginning of each session of the seminar, at least one student will be asked to read his or her abstract, and the rest of the seminar will then be responsible for responding to it. I will collect the abstracts each week for comment and grading (4 = A, 3.5 = B+, 3 = B, etc.) and return them the following week. Please consult a recent issue of the Journal of Early Christian

Studies (available online through JSTOR) for examples of the kind of abstract that I want you to write.

In addition, you will prepare one book report during the course of the semester; report possibilities are listed on the syllabus. You will be given 45 minutes in which to present your report, relate it to course materials, and engage the seminar in discussion. For the final project required in the seminar, you will write a full-length, critical review of your book (eight to ten pages in length, double-spaced, 12 point font). Due date for final project: Wednesday, December 14.

Students' work will be evaluated on the basis of class participation (20%), abstracts (30%), and written book review (50%).

Schedule of Seminar Sessions and Readings

Aug. 26: Introduction

Sept. 2: Michel Foucault, The Care of the Self (=History of Sexuality, vol. 3), pp. 3-144
 Averil Cameron, "Redrawing the Map: Early Christian Territory After Foucault,"
Journal of Roman Studies 76 (1986): 266-71 (DG 11.J86; available online
 through JStor (from the SU Library's homepage, click on "Databases," then
 click on "General Humanities"; scroll down to find JStor as well as
 Project Muse)
 Elizabeth A. Clark, "Foucault, the Fathers, and Sex," JAAR 56 (1988): 619-41
 (JSTOR)

Sept. 9: Seneca, Medea
 Foucault, Care of the Self, pp. 147-85
 Martha Nussbaum, The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic
 Ethics, pp. 439-83

Report: Carlin Barton, The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the
 Monster

Sept. 16: Longus, Daphnis and Chloe
 Foucault, Care of the Self, pp. 189-210, 229-240
 J. Winkler, "The Education of Chloe: Hidden Injuries of Sex," in Constraints
 of Desire, pp. 101-26 (graduate lounge reserve)

Report: Shadi Bartsch, The Mirror of the Self: Sexuality, Self-Knowledge, and the Gaze
 in the Early Roman Empire

Sept. 23: Tertullian, On the Apparel of Women
http://www.tertullian.org/works/de_cultu_feminarum.htm
Acts of Paul and Thecla (graduate lounge reserve)
 Peter Brown, The Body and Society, Part One

Report: Teresa Shaw, The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity
OR

Elizabeth A. Castelli, Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making

Note: Sept. 30 is Eid ul Fitr; no class.

Oct. 7: Lives of the Desert Fathers (Historia monachorum in Aegypto), trans. Benedicta
Ward

P. Brown, The Body and Society, Part Two

Patricia Miller, "Desert Asceticism and 'The Body From Nowhere,'" JECS 2
(1994): 137-53 (Project Muse)

Report: Susanna Elm, Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity
OR

Georgia Frank, The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims Living Saints in Christian Late
Antiquity

Oct. 14: Harlots of the Desert (St. Mary of Egypt and St. Pelagia)

Stephen J. Davis, "Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early
Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men," JECS 10 (2002):1-36

Virginia Burrus, The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography,
Introduction and ch. 4 (graduate lounge reserve)

Report: Lynda Coon, Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity
OR

Derek Krueger, Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early
Christian East

Oct. 21: Jerome, Letter 22 "To Eustochium" (NPNE, vol. 6; graduate lounge reserve)

P. Brown, The Body and Society, Part Three

P. Miller, "The Blazing Body: Ascetic Desire in Jerome's Letter to Eustochium,"
JECS 1 (1993): 21-45

Report: Virginia Burrus, "Begotten, Not Made": Conceiving Manhood in Late
Antiquity OR

David Hunter, Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The
Jovinianist Controversy

Oct. 28: Athanasius, Life of St. Anthony (trans. Gregg)

Geoffrey Galt Harpham, The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism, Part One

Report: David Brakke, Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism
OR

David Brakke, Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early
Christianity

Note: I will be out of town on Nov. 4; no class.

- Nov. 11: Jerome, Life of Paul of Thebes (graduate lounge reserve)
 Patricia Miller, "Jerome's Centaur: A Hyper-Icon of the Desert," JECS (1996): 209-33
 Virginia Burrus, The Sex Lives of Saints, ch. 1 (grad. student lounge)

Report: Mathew Kuefler, The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity

OR

Daniel Caner, Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity

- Nov. 18: Victricius, "Praising the Saints" (De laude sanctorum), in Gillian Clark, "Victricius Of Rouen: Praising the Saints," JECS 7 (1999): 365-99
 P. Miller, "'The Little Blue Flower is Red': Relics and the Poetizing of the Body," JECS 8 (2000): 213-36
 P. Miller, "Visceral Seeing: The Holy Body in Late Ancient Christianity," JECS 12 (2004): 391-411

Report: Glenn Peers, Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium

Nov. 25: I will be out of town at the SBL; no class.

- Dec. 2: John of Damascus, "On Holy Images" (short excerpt)
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/johndam-icons.html>
 Charles Barber, Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm

Report: Henry Maguire, The Icons of their Bodies: Saints and their Images in Byzantium

Books available for purchase in Follett's Orange Bookstore (Marshall Square Mall)

Athanasius, Life of Anthony (trans. Gregg)
 Charles Barber, Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm
 Peter Brown, The Body and Society
 Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality, vol. 3: The Care of the Self
 Geoffrey Galt Harpham, The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism
 Longus, Daphnis and Chloe (trans. Paul Turner)
 Seneca, Medea (trans. Frederick Ahl)
 Benedicta Ward (trans.), Lives of the Desert Fathers
 Benedicta Ward (trans.), Harlots of the Desert