

## **“Authoritative Texts and Public Display in the Spaces of the Roman Empire”**

**Prof. Dr. Laura S. Nasrallah, New Testament and Early Christianity, Harvard University:  
Divinity School**

This seminar will explore several case studies in the public display of authoritative texts in the Roman Empire. Together we'll ask: How should we think about the “publication” and display of archives or authoritative texts in civic spaces? How might this publication influence and even inspire early Christian writings of the second century CE?

We will engage in detective work using several case studies. We'll virtually travel to an archive wall inscribed at Aphrodisias; to a puzzling philosophical inscription at Oinoanda; to an imperial rescript inscribed in Phrygia; and to the writings of the second-century Christian writer Justin, who claims to address the imperial family in his *Apology* and appears to append an imperial rescript to his text.

Roughly contemporaneous with the production of a philosophical-political treatise like Justin's was a burgeoning of the collection, circulation, and sometimes invention of letters that often claimed to directly address someone other than the actual recipients. Scholarship has addressed these in terms of epistolary novels, on the one hand, and pseudo-documentary evidence, on the other. How does this literary phenomenon provide an additional context for the epigraphic and literary case studies we observe?

These case studies will let us explore issues of space, power, and religion, and to see how these are intertwined in antiquity. It will also allow participants to practice skills in bringing together an analysis of civic space, epigraphic materials, and literary texts from antiquity.

### ***Syllabus***

In our present world, we see many instances of political power and resistance. We see the ways in which political propaganda is centrally distributed, and how it is reflected back by various

organizations that take and use the same rhetoric (in words or images) and shift the messages in subtle ways, as we see in the famous poster of [Barack Obama by Shephard Fairey](#), which has been re-deployed in various ways. We see the ways in which people choose various venues and practices by which to address political power, such as [the ACLU's public letter to Trump, published in the New York Times](#). My examples come from the context of the United States. I am sure that you have many others to add.

With our readings today, we enter into the world of political power, distribution of messages, and resistance in antiquity. As you read, you may find it helpful to ask regarding both Justin and the inscription from Phrygia:

What is set forth as the main argument or point of the text?

What is the form of distribution of the message? (Or, what form does it *claim* to take?)

What is the *material* of the distribution of the message? What difference does that make? (This question of course applies especially to the inscription, although it's interesting to note that Justin's *Apologies* are known in part from Eusebius's *History of the Church* and in part from a late manuscript.)

What are some specific phrases that, to your mind, indicate political power and religious discourse in each text?

Selection from Justin Martyr's *Apologies* (trans. Barnard). (If you wish to refer to the best edition of the Greek, I recommend that of Marcovich.)

Tor Hauken et al., "A new inscription from Phrygia: A Rescript of Septimius Severus and Caracalla to the *coloni* of the Imperial Estate at Tymion," 33-43.

Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 130-153

## “Interdisciplinary Insights”

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rebecca Scherr, English Language Literature, Fac. of Humanities, University of Oslo

This seminar will be a space for questions and discussion regarding interdisciplinary research and writing. While “interdisciplinarity” has been a word used and promoted in humanities higher education for the past several years, there is still a lot of confusion about what it means, how to practice it, what it means in terms of designing methodology, and how well such research is accepted in various disciplines. We will examine these issues (and more) and discuss how to relate them to your own research.

As a point of departure for our discussion, I have chosen two texts. The first is a scholarly journal article from 2002 that outlines both practical and theoretical questions associated with interdisciplinary research. The second is an excerpt from Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (translated into English); this excerpt is taken from one of the most authoritative texts for feminist thought and is an example of interdisciplinary writing and thinking in action, one that has clear political and social implications. With De Beauvoir’s work, we will pay particular attention to her methodology and how she fuses insights from various fields of study in order to promote her arguments.

### *Texts (available as pdfs):*

Palmer, Carole and Laura J. Neumann. “The Information Work of Interdisciplinary Humanities Scholars: Exploration and Translation.” *The Library Quarterly* 72.1 (2002): 85-117.

From De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Deirdre Bair. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Chapters: “The Point of View of Historical Materialism,” “The Nomads” and “Early Tillers of the Soil.” (NB the .pdf is upside down, so you will have to rotate view - and there are some notes in there)

## **"Is law like a mediaeval cathedral? Reflections on Karl Llewellyn's *On the Good, the True, the Beautiful, in Law*"**

**Prof. Dr. Hans Petter Graver, Dep. of Private Law, Fac. of Law, University of Oslo**

I will talk about institutions, path dependence and cathedrals. Required reading is the article by Karl Llewellyn. My paper is recommended and gives a gist of the perspective I will introduce in the discussion of Llewellyn's article.

### ***Texts (available as pdfs):***

Karl Llewellyn, "On the Good, the True, the Beautiful, in Law"

Hans Petter Graver, "An Institutional Approach to the Rule of Law. *The Rule of Law and the West*"

## **"The Authority of the Gaze"**

**Prof. Dr. Bente Larsen, Dep. of Philosophy, Classics, History of Arts and Ideas, Fac. of Humanities, University of Oslo**

In my seminar a fresco by Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation*, c. 1440-41. will form the point of departure. It is a fresco that in many ways represents an unorthodox interpretation of the Annunciation as narrated in Luke 1:26-38. In comparison with the numerous pictorial interpretations of this scriptural passage it is surprisingly bare, expressing no sentiments, no action, no pictorial theatrics. It is placed in cell 3, in the Monastery of San Marco, Florence, beside a window through which an almost blinding sunlight streams into the room emphasizing the whiteness of the fresco. It is a fresco that the French art historian, George Didi-Huberman interprets as mystery made paint rather than legible. In the seminar I shall open up a discussion of this interpretation, and in the discussion compare Fra Angelico's fresco with other pictorial interpretations of the same text. I shall also ask, which text is authoritative, the text or the interpretations of the text. Ontologically and epistemologically it will be a discussion on the differences between the historicism of iconography and hermeneutics and phenomenology of

visuality. The discussion will be put into perspective by two texts discussing a picture by Nicolas Poussin, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 1638-9, one iconographic study by Erwin Panofsky and a semiotic approach by Louis Marin.

***Literature (.pdf will be forwarded)***

Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Bloomsbury (1975), 2014, p. 106-179

Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, Penn State Press, 2005, p. x-xxvi, 1-52

Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting, Its Origins and Character*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953

Louis Marin, "Towards a Theory of Reading in the Visual Arts: Poussin's 'The Arcadian Shepherds'", in Donald Preziosi, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 263-275.

**"Authority *On the Road Again*: Travelling Memory and the Case of Hagar"**

**Prof. Dr. Marianne B. Kartzow, Fac. of Theology, University of Oslo**

The authority of texts has a spatial context, geographical, institutional and symbolic. But what happens in-between the spaces and on the way, when texts are moving, travelling, crossing borders, and entering new landscape, embraced by new people and involved in new discourses? When the Human Rights are given a national role or the Bible is translated into a new language, something happens to these texts. Authority is re-negotiated and texts are changing in complex ways. In this lecture I will reflect upon these issues by help of three analytical concepts: Memory, intersectionality and travelling theory. The case study I will employ is taken from the (partly shared) religious traditions about Hagar from Egypt (Genesis 16 and 21). In the Hebrew Bible she came up as the solution when the patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah did not get a son. As a slave Hagar could legally work as a surrogate mother for them. The drama, however, leads her to flee into the wilderness, first as a pregnant woman and then with her thirsty son, before she

leaves the Genesis-story. The travelling memory of Hagar, however, has moved to several other texts and context, to early Christian and rabbinic texts, to Islam or to popular culture. What kind of authority has been given to the texts about her? How has the role and position of Hagar, who started her textual life as a female slave from Egypt, been transformed and negotiated? By highlighting the case of Hagar, the instability, mobility and flexibility of authoritative texts will be addressed, by help of intersectional perspectives. If it is argued that Hagar travels from marginality to authority, is it the same Hagar who arrives?

*To read for preparation:*

Knapp, Gudrun-Axeli. "Race, Class, Gender: Reclaiming Baggage in Fast Travelling Theories." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 12, no. 3 (2005): 249-65.

<http://ejw.sagepub.com/content/12/3/249.full.pdf+html>

Further recommended literature:

Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

Grung, Anne Hege. *Gender Justice in Muslim-Christian Readings: Christian and Muslim Women in Norway: Making Meaning of Texts from the Bible, the Koran, and the Hadith* Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi 2015.