

Department of Classical Studies
Course Outline
CS 9450A: SORDID ROME: FILTH, POLLUTION, AND DISEASE IN THE
ANCIENT CITY
Autumn 2024



INSTRUCTOR: Kelly Olson (kolson2@uwo.ca) she/her

OFFICE: Lawson Hall 3227 (519-661-2111 x 84525)

OFFICE HOURS: Mondays, 4:00-5:00 or by appointment (in-person or Zoom)

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- *The Archaeology of Sanitation in Roman Italy: Toilets, Sewers, and Water Systems*, Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow (Univ. of North Carolina, ppk, 2018)
- Various articles and chapters found elsewhere (under the 'course readings' button on our OWL site)

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Dirt: dust, soil, refuse, excrement, bacteria, filth, sleaze, slime, smut— the word easily changes its meaning from the physical to the moral. Dirt, the cause of pollution, contamination and the taboo, is interpreted according to pre-existing anxieties and social norms, including those of religion, empire, individualism, race, gender, and class: different ideas of how the world works result in different notions of contamination, filth, and how the body is susceptible or impervious to its surroundings. How was pollution policed and controlled in Roman antiquity? How did Roman culture construct and negotiate dirt and filth? Topics to be discussed include toilets and waste disposal methods in Roman

antiquity; mortality, disease, and poverty; religious pollution and miasma; apotropaism and the evil eye; curse tablets and sexual graffiti; filth and the senses (taste, smell, and sight); and pollution and death.

IMPORTANT POLICIES:

Note from the Dean of Arts and Humanities

You are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that you have not taken an antirequisite course. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as basis of appeal. If you are not eligible for a course, you may be removed from it at any time, and you will receive no adjustment to your fees. These decisions cannot be appealed.

Religious Accommodation

When a course requirement conflicts with a religious holiday that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities, students should request accommodation for their absence in writing at least two weeks prior to the holiday to the course instructor and/or the Academic Counselling office of their Faculty of Registration. Please consult University's list of recognized religious holidays (updated annually) at:

<https://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Accessible Education, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities can be found at:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.

You may not use a generative AI program to create a final draft of your essay.

Academic Counselling

Your Home Faculty's Academic Counselling or Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here: https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html

Mental Health Support

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender-based and sexual violence

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, [here](#). To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Accessible Education

Please contact the course instructor if you require lecture or printed material in an alternate format or if any other arrangements can make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Accessible Education at http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html if you have any questions regarding accommodations.

Learning Development and Success

Counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre (<https://learning.uwo.ca>) are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- knowledge of critical vocabularies, methods of analysis, histories and concerns related to social and material pollution
- the ability to apply this knowledge to contemporary discussions of social contamination and ecological pollution
- To become aware of the problems with and limitations of using ancient archaeological and literary evidence.
- To investigate modern reactions to, interpretations of, and preconceptions about that evidence.
- understand the cultural importance of dirt, pollution, and waste disposal and explain how each is both a reflection and an influence on a society

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS:

- an advanced understanding of the importance of historical perspective, and how social norms and customs and the construction and consumption of material culture (e.g. architecture, sculpture and painting) is a product of time, events and context;
- an understanding of how iconography/symbolism in any historical period may be used *inter alia* to signify cultural identity, political power, state nationalism, and historical memorial
- the ability of critical visual analysis of archaeological evidence, and the results of such analysis, to formulate, develop, and argue an hypothesis/thesis based on this primary evidence;
- a developed understanding of the limits of archaeological evidence in the reconstruction of ancient societies and the restrictions the material record places on our ability to formulate hypotheses and interpretations;

- advanced oral communication skills through the oral presentations of a scholarly argument/hypothesis using the archaeological and written evidence, the ability to lead and direct class discussion, and meet the challenge of questions/criticisms of seminar content;
- to have advanced written communication skills in the clear and organized presentation of an argument/hypothesis within the prescribed limits of the writing assignments; among the basic research skills acquired are the ability to collect relevant bibliography on a prescribed topic, critically engage with the scholarly literature with an assessment of the relative merits of an argument, and write a thesis in a format that includes a clear introductory statement of intent, a well-constructed and logical presentation of the argument including the relative merits of various scholarly opinion, and a conclusion that gives an assessment of the evidence and the author's own evaluation of the evidence.

GRADES:

Essay	40%
Presentation	25%
Student questions on essay presentations	5%
TWO article reviews (15% each)	30%
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	100%

This will be a discussion-based seminar which will require participation from **all** students.

ESSAY AND PRESENTATIONS:

- **Essays** should be 5000 words, and are due ****TUESDAY DEC 17th****
- I encourage you to write the essay on a topic of interest to you (in consultation with me). Although we cover many topics pertinent to Roman filth and pollution rituals in the class readings and discussion, some we simply do not have time to examine. You can also move outside Rome proper and write about another ancient city or area (Pompeii, Ostia, ancient Britain).
- **Presentations** should be about 15-20 minutes in length (in other words, conference-paper length, or **8-10** double-spaced typed pages). You will choose a date for your presentation in the first week or two of classes; if you need to cancel or change your date **you must find a classmate willing to take your place**.
- Your essay should incorporate and address questions, suggestions, and comments raised during your presentation; thus, the essay and presentation are on the same topic.

- **Article reviews:** students are required to choose **TWO** of our readings in advance and prepare questions and comments for discussion in class. (Our textbook is **excluded** from these). For each article presentation, in 10-15 minutes:
 1. please summarize the article in question
 2. tell us what the author set out to do, and using what evidence
 3. if s/he achieved this, in your opinion
 4. Tell us what you liked or didn't like about the article or chapter.
 5. Please also pose questions to us about the content
 6. Please type up your report and turn it in to me (it should be 1-2 double-spaced typed pages, or thereabouts).

COURSE OUTLINE:

Tues Sept 10:

- **Introduction to course**
- **Theories of dirt and ideals of cleanliness**

Reading:

Campkin, B., and R. Cox. 2007. Introduction: materialities and metaphors of dirt and cleanliness. In B. Campkin and R. Cox (eds) *Dirt: New Geographies of Cleanliness and Contamination*. I. B. Tauris: 1-8

D. Larmour. 2007. Holes in the body: sites of abjection in Juvenal's Rome. In D. Larmour and D. Spencer (eds) *The Sites of Rome: Time, Space, Memory*. Oxford University Press: 168-210.

Bradley, M. 2012. Approaches to pollution and propriety. In M. Bradley (ed) In M. Bradley (ed) *Rome, Pollution and Propriety: Dirt, Disease and Hygiene in the Eternal City from Antiquity to Modernity*. Cambridge University Press: 11-40.

Duschinsky, R. 2017. The politics of purity: when, actually, is dirt matter out of place? *Thesis Eleven*, 119.1: 63-7

Lennon, J. 2014. *Pollution and Religion in Ancient Rome*. Cambridge University Press: 29-44 (definitions).

Tues Sept 17:

- **Dirt on the body**
- **Bathhouses and fulleries**
- **Women's dirt**

Reading:

Lawrence, T., 2021. Breastmilk, breastfeeding, and the female body in early Imperial Rome. In M. Bradley, *et al.* (eds) *Bodily Fluids in Antiquity*. Routledge: 224-39.

Bradley, M. 2002. 'It all comes out in the wash': Looking harder at the Roman *fullonica*. *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 15:20-44.

Chavarria, S. 2022. Menstrual blood: uses, values, and controls in ancient Rome. *Cahiers «Mondes anciens»*. *Histoire et anthropologie des mondes anciens*, (16).

Harris, W.V., 2020. Scatological asklepios: the use of excrement in Graeco-Roman healthcare. *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 75.1:1-23.

Callaghan, H., 2007. Birth dirt. In M. Kirkham (ed). *Exploring the Dirty Side of Women's Health*. Routledge: 8-25.

Tues Sept 24:

- **Dirt and the senses: smell and sight (*squalor*, *sordes* and mourning)**

Reading:

Kolostri-Ostow, A. O. 2015. Roman urban smells: the archaeological evidence. In M. Bradley (ed). *Smell and the Ancient Senses*. Routledge: 90-109.

Morley, N. 2015. Urban smells and Roman noses. In M. Bradley (ed) *Smell and the Ancient Senses*. Routledge: 110-19.

Bradley, M. 2015. Foul bodies in ancient Rome. In M. Bradley (ed) *Smell and the Ancient Senses*. Routledge: 133-45.

Olson, K. 2017. Masculinity and Dress in Roman Antiquity. Routledge: 91-104.

Croom, A. 2011. Running the Roman Home. The History Press: 61-72

Tues Oct 1:

- **Pollution & waste disposal**

Whitehouse, D. 1995. Roman glass boats. *Journal of Glass Studies* 37: 133-5.

Hobson, B. 2009. Latrinae et foricae: *Toilets in the Roman World*. Duckworth: 89- 104, 105-115.

Kolostri-Ostow, A. O. 2015. *The Archaeology of Sanitation in Roman Italy: Toilets, Sewers, and Water Systems*. Univ. of North Carolina Press: 1-37, 52-83.

Havlíček, F., and M. Morcinek. 2016. Waste and pollution in the ancient Roman Empire. *Journal of Landscape Ecology* 9.3: 33-49.

Levin-Richardson, S. 2015. Bodily waste and boundaries in Pompeian graffiti. In D. Dutsch and A. Suter (eds) *Ancient Obscenities: Their Nature and Use in the Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds*. Univ. of Michigan Press: 225-54.

Tues Oct 8: Mortality and disease

Reading:

Scheidel, Walter. Disease and death in the ancient city of Rome (March 21, 2009). *Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics*. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1347510> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1347510>

Scheidel, W. 1994. Libitina's bitter gains: seasonal mortality and endemic disease in the ancient city of Rome. *Ancient Society* 25: 151-75.

Holt, E., and S. Palazzo. 2013. The role of rodents in the disease ecology of the Roman city. *Archaeological Review from Cambridge*, 28.2: 132-154.

Scobie, A. 1986. Slums, Sanitation, and Mortality. *Klio* 68: 399-433.

Morley, N., 2004. The salubrity of the Roman city. In H. King (ed). *Health in Antiquity*. Routledge: 214-26

READING BREAK: OCT 14-18: NO CLASS

Tues Oct 22: *Insulae*, poverty & destitution

Harris, W. V. 2011. Poverty and destitution in the Roman empire. In *Rome's Imperial Economy: Twelve Essays*. Oxford Univ. Press: 27-56.

Morley, N. 2006. The poor in the city of Rome. In M. Atkins and R. Osbourne (eds), *Poverty in the Roman World*. Cambridge University Press: 21-39

Woolf, G. 2006. Writing poverty in Rome. . In M. Atkins and R. Osbourne (eds), *Poverty in the Roman World*. Cambridge University Press: 83-99

Storey, G.R. 2013. Housing and domestic architecture. In P. Erdkamp (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rome*. Cambridge University Press: 151-168.

Rosillo-López, C., 2021. Destitute, homeless and (almost) invisible: Urban poverty and the rental market in the Roman world. In C. Courrier *et al.* (eds) *Ancient History from Below*: 104-121. Routledge.

Tues Oct 29: *Miasma* and purity

Fantham, E. 2012. Purification in ancient Rome. In M. Bradley (ed) *Rome, Pollution and Propriety: Dirt, Disease and Hygiene in the Eternal City from Antiquity to Modernity*. Cambridge University Press: 59- 66.

Lennon, J. 2014. *Pollution and Religion in Ancient Rome*. Cambridge University Press: 44-54, 81-88 (menstruation), 90-135 (blood).

Linke, B., 2013. Sacral purity and social order in ancient Rome. In C. Frevel and C. Nihan (eds) *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*. Brill: 289-309.

Lennon, J. 2018. Contaminating touch in the Roman world. In A. Purves (ed) *Touch and the Ancient Senses*. Routledge: 121-33.

Hopkins, J. The ‘sacred sewer:’ tradition and religion in the Cloaca Maxima. In M. Bradley (ed) *Rome, Pollution and Propriety: Dirt, Disease and Hygiene in the Eternal City from Antiquity to Modernity*. Cambridge University Press: 81-102.

Tues Nov 5: Apotropaism, demons, the Evil Eye

Parker, A. 2021. Phalli fighting with fluids: approaching images of ejaculating phalli in the Roman world. In M. Bradley, et al. (eds) *Bodily Fluids in Antiquity*. Routledge: 173-90.

Elliott, J. 2016. *Beware the Evil Eye: The Evil Eye in the Bible and the Ancient World*. Vol. 2: Greece and Rome. James Clarke & Co.: 70-83, 143-70

Clarke, J. 2007. *Looking at Laughter: Humor, Power, and Transgression in Roman Visual Culture, 100- BC -AD 250*. Univ. of California Press: 63-81.

Clarke, J. 2007. Three uses of the pygmy and the Aethiops at Pompeii: decorating, 'othering,' and warding off demons. In L. Bricault, et al. (eds), *Nile into Tiber: Proceedings of the IIIrd International Conference of Isis Studies, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, May 11-14, 2005*. Brill:155-169

Bohak, G., 2015. Amulets. In R. Raja and J. Rüpke (eds) *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World*. Wiley: 81-95.

Tues Nov 12: Sexual 'filth:' curse tablets, sexual graffiti, the *os impurum*, masturbation

Richlin, A. 1992. *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*. Oxford Univ. Press: 105-43.

Williams, C. 2014. Sexual themes in Greek and Latin graffiti. In T. Hubbard (ed) *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities* Blackwell: 493-508.

Evangelou, E. 2022. Sex and disgust in Martial's *Epigrams*. In A. Seraphim et al (eds) *Sex and the Ancient City: Sex and Sexual Practices in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. De Gruyter: 353-75.

McKie, S. 2022. *Living and Cursing in the Roman West*. Bloomsbury: 104-29.

Lennon, J. 2022. *Dirt and Denigration: Stigma and Marginalisation in Ancient Rome*. Mohr Siebeck: 67-97.

Tues Nov 19: Pollution, poisons, and death

Bodel, J. 2000. Dealing with the dead: undertakers, executioners and potter's fields in ancient Rome. In V. Hope and E. Marshall (eds). *Death and Disease in the Ancient City* (Routledge): 128-51.

Scheidel, W. 2013. Disease and death. In Paul Erdkamp (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rome* (Cambridge): 45-59.

Cilliers, L. and F. Retief. 2000. Poisons, poisoning and the drug trade in ancient Rome. *Akroterion*, 45.1: 88-100.

Lennon, J. 2022. *Dirt and Denigration: Stigma and Marginalisation in Ancient Rome*. Mohr Siebeck: 135-64

Tues Nov 26: Student presentations

Tues Dec 3: Student presentations