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HIST 7112 ANCIENT YOUTH



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Wednesdays 11–1
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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OUTLINE

Neoi, young men between the ages of 20 and 30, were one of the most important age groups in the Classical and Hellenistic Greek world, whose cultural identity had deep roots in the historical and mythical past. Models of heroism cluster around the *neos* as a type: in myth, in historiography, in ritual and iconography. As a group, *neoi* were a structural element of civic society, associated with the gymnasium, with physical exercise and competition, and with military activity. Recent work on Hellenistic warfare has successfully emphasized their importance as a military force within Greek cities (with the *ephebeia* as a preparatory phase).

Much of the evidence for *neoi*, especially that of iconography, myth and ritual, has been ignored or misread because of the almost exclusive focus in modern scholarship on the earlier, and transient, phase of *ephebeia* and on the initiation rituals associated with this phase of life. In this course we will interpret initiation rituals and the myths that 'explain' them as part of a much more prolonged phase of young male socialization and training, and question the use and validity of 'Black Hunter' models of structural opposition, ephobic exclusion (and marginality) and subsequent integration into the world of the adult male citizens. We will look closely at images of young heroes, beardless gods and *daimones* (*Kabiroi*, *Korybantēs*, *Dioskouroi* etc), with a particular focus on Hellenistic literary and visual imagery.

The important role of young men in Greek cities had a counterpart at the courts of the Hellenistic kings. Already at the Macedonian court, the *basilikoi neaniskoi* combined a courtly and a military role: they were young nobles who protected the person of the king and constituted his *philoī* (friends). Hunting was one of their pastimes, Herakles their patron deity. They are depicted on well-known Macedonian tomb frescoes wearing the *chlamys*, or short hunter's cloak. The *chlamys*, made famous in P. Vidal-Naquet's structuralist study of ephobic initiation rituals, *the Black Hunter*, was in fact not only the ephobe's costume: it was the hunter's costume par excellence and was worn in Macedonia by different age groups.

The Macedonian model continued to shape the institutions of later Hellenistic dynasties, with those of Ptolemaic Egypt most visible to us; here, the age-group was closely linked to the institution of military service, while young men at court, playing their part in high politics, are frequently discussed in the pages of Polybios. In civic politics, especially of the Hellenistic period, *neoi* were 'adult', but only to an extent: they were excluded from council membership and magistracies but could vote in the assembly. They had a strong corporate identity and are often attested as a pressure group. In politics as in warfare, *neoi* were associated with impetuosity and recklessness; they were in need of control, training and integration; stories of conflict with older men (*presbyteroi*) are frequent in the historiography and are attested in epigraphic documents; civic gymnasia carefully segregated the *neoi* from younger boys.

The source material for this topic is challenging and students should be willing to tackle a wide range, from literary and historiographical sources to coins, inscriptions, archaeology and iconography, and to deal with fragmentary evidence. Each week, the source material will form an important part of the

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reading. Secondary literature is mostly in English, although much of value on the subject has been written in French, so an ability and willingness to read in that language would be welcome, even if not essential. The course will be examined by 2 essays of c. 3000 words each.

WEEKLY TOPICS

1. Introduction: Dangerous Young Men
2. Black Hunter variations : the meaning of margins
3. Models of initiation: Sparta, Crete and Macedonia
4. Macedonia and the hunt : Herakles the hunter, and how to recognize an ephebe by his cloak
5. The *neos* as hero, and some beardless gods and daimones
6. The culture of the gymnasium and the development of the ephebic ideal
7. *Agones*
8. Ephebes and civic defence; *neoi* at war
9. The Hellenistic courts : Royal pages and the role of *neoi* in Ptolemaic Egypt
10. Oppositions: old and young men in civic politics

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