



**BIWEEKLY COLLOQUIUM**  
Monday, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 4:15 p.m.

**LANDSCAPE AS METAPHOR: ATTICA IN THE POLITICAL IMAGERY OF  
CLASSICAL ATHENS.**

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The proposed paper presents an ongoing book project on the role played by idealized representations of the Attic landscape in the political discourse of Classical Athens. From the fifth century onwards, Attica came to occupy an important place in the narratives that articulated the political identity of the Athenians, in their self-perception as group and in the collective values and norms on which they built their community. In panegyric myth-history – to name but a few well-known examples –, the defense of the Attica against foreign invaders since time immemorial obtained a canonical place and became a symbol of Athenian military valor. In the same narratives, the image of Attica as a refuge for the oppressed came to symbolize Athenian claims to hegemony in the Greek world, a claim that was also promoted through the Eleusinian myth about the origins of agriculture in Attica. During the Peloponnesian War rural life in the countryside became a metaphor of peace, in other moments the peace and beauty of an idealized Attic countryside was used as a symbol of harmony and unity in the polis. Such symbolic use of Attica – and many more examples could be added – was widespread in panegyric oratory and official art; it was as a powerful emblem in political deliberations; it became manifest in ritual and found expression in non-cultic performative practices like the instruction of the ephebes or outbursts of building activity in certain moments of history; and non least it played an important role in tragedy and comedy, whose authors drew intensely on that symbolism and the related narratives. At the core of this symbolic exploitation of Attica were visual or rhetorical imaginations of an idealized Attic landscape; such representations are most notable in the great choral songs in drama but occur frequently in oratory and other media. As will be seen, these imaginations were charged with political meaning and thus made the landscape a potent symbol in Athenian political discourse. The proposed paper examines these symbolic representations of the Attic landscape by discussing a number of case studies from the fifth and fourth centuries. It concludes with general considerations of the reasons why imaginations of the landscape proved such powerful symbols in political discourse and situates the Athenian evidence in the broader context of politically meaningful representations of landscapes from other cultures and epochs.

**Venue: Leibnizstraße 1, Seminar Room 204**