**Justin Biggi**

Death and the Maiden: Commemoration as an Athenian Tradition

This paper aims to explore the role epigraphy played in “setting the stage” for the Athenian

funerary tradition of the epitaphios logos, the yearly public funeral oration. Expanding on

recent research which explores the role of epigraphy as a ‘semantic’ construct of Athenian

topography, this paper focuses on the ways in which funerary and commemorative

epigraphy expressed the multifaceted, often complex, reality of Athenian citizen identity by

setting it in conversation with the funeral oration as a traditional performance of this

identity. Emotionally and philosophically, death forces people to confront not only their own

mortality, but the continuity of their communities. Traditions of death-rituals, such as the

funerary procession, graveside ritual and remembrance practices offered structure in

moments of great psychological distress. Commemoration and urban memory, articulated

through monuments, were (and are) part of these traditions on a much larger scale.

Inscriptions contextualised these monuments, and contributed to creating an urban web of

meaning. In the case of Athens, civic commemoration was further codified and turned into

a tradition with the epitaphios logos, which rested at the crux of public and personal

funerary practices. This paper explores the significance of such a speech not only as a

literary document, but as an ever-shifting performance of citizenship, given context not

only by its role within Athenian mourning practices, but as a tradition which, year after

year, was fundamental to Athenian identity.