

Syracuse University, Department of Religion, Fall 2011

**REL 205: ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION**

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“Everything is full of gods.” (Thales, 6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.E.)

“Many are the shapes of things divine.” (Euripides, 5<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.E.)

This course is an introduction to the world of thought and practice that contemporary scholars call ancient Greek religion. The main materials of the course are drawn from the ancient Greeks themselves—from poets, artists, playwrights, and mythographers. Emphasis will be placed on the myths and festivals that formed the fabric of ancient Greek religious practice and outlook. Ancient perspectives on *cosmos* (universe), *polis* (city and society), *psyche* (self), and *theos* (god) will be explored.

The study of ancient Greek religion can be unsettling, as you can see from the two quotations above. It can be unsettling because the sense of religion that many of us in the United States have today has been mediated largely through monotheistic religions like Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. These religions have very different sets of assumptions and values when compared with ancient Greek religion. With its multiplicity of divinities, the absence of Scriptural books, its sacrificial and ritualistic practices, and more, ancient Greek religion is really an “other” way of being-in-the-world religiously. In order to learn about this other religion in a reflective way, you need to keep these two important perspectives in mind:

1. *Imaginative sympathy*: take seriously the world of the ancient Greek person; assume that the religious thought or practice carries real meaning for that person.
2. *Critical distance*: try to raise questions that may not be raised by the ancient participants, such as, what effect does this faith or practice have on the participant? On society?; what kinds of values does a given text suggest or implicitly depend upon?; what are the conceptions of human nature and divine nature in particular texts and practices?; what does a given dimension of Greek religion show to be fundamental to human happiness and welfare?

These are the kinds of questions and issues that you need to keep in mind as you read and reflect on the materials in this course.

Overall learning objectives:

1. Learning to study religion from a critical and historical perspective
2. Knowing how to read and interpret primary sources from antiquity
3. Learning to write analytical papers about religion based on primary sources

**REQUIRED TEXTS** (available in Follett’s Orange Bookstore)

*Religion in the Ancient Greek City*, by L. Zaidman and P. Pantel (= RAGC on syllabus)  
BL785.Z3513

*Ancient Greek Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, by J. Mikalson (=AGR on syllabus) BL783.M55

Note: both RAGC and AGR are available for rental.

Hesiod, *Theogony* (trans. by Norman O. Brown) PA4010.E5T5

Aeschylus, *The Oresteia* (trans. by Robert Fagles) PA3827.A7F5

Euripides, *Alcestis and Other Plays* (Penguin Classics) PA3626.A2G82

Euripides, *Euripides II* (in a series entitled *The Complete Greek Tragedies*) PA3626.A2G82

Euripides, *Euripides V* PA3626.A2G82

*The Homeric Hymns* (trans. by Thelma Sargent) PA4025.H8A8

Please note: these books are also on reserve in the library. Be aware that 1) the library has only the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of Mikalson, so the page numbers will be different; 2) Euripides' plays *Alcestis*, *The Bacchae*, and *Heracles* are all in a volume entitled *The Complete Greek Tragedies*; 3) the translation of Hesiod is by a different translator and does not have the Introduction as in Brown's translation, which is required reading; 4) the translation of the *Homeric Hymns* is by a different translator and so will not be word-for-word the same as the translation available in the bookstore.

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND REQUIREMENTS:** Students are responsible for bringing the appropriate ancient texts to class for purposes of discussion and in-class reference.

Introduction: Aug. 29 – Sept. 7

[Note: Monday, Sept. 5 is Labor Day; no class]

Reading: RAGC, pp. 3-20 (for Aug. 31)

AGR, Ch. 1 and *Homeric Hymn to Earth* (Sargent, p. 79) (for Sept. 7)

## I. Cosmology and Mythology

### A. Origins and Relations of Divine Powers: Sept. 12-19

Reading: Hesiod, *Theogony* (including the introduction)

RAGC, pp. 143-72, 176-86

AGR, pp. 32-38

**Reading log due, Sept. 14**

### B. Engaging the Divine: Ritual and Cult: Sept. 21-26

Reading: *Homeric Hymns to Hermes and Pythian Apollo* (Sargent, pp. 20-45)

RAGC, pp. 27-45, 121-28, 191-98

AGR, pp. 92-102

**Reading log due, Sept. 26**

### C. Divine-Human Interactions in Ritual and Cult: Sept. 28-Oct. 3

Reading: *Homeric Hymns to Hestia, Athena, and Artemis* (Sargent, pp. 74, 78, 60, 77, 76)

RAGC, pp. 63-71, 186-91

AGR, pp. 59-61, 68-78, and Chs. 5 and 7

**Reading log due, Oct. 3**

D. Essay Workshop: October 5

**\*\*\*FIRST TAKE-HOME ESSAY DUE OCT. 10 IN CLASS\*\*\***

II. The Hero: Two Views

A. The Hero and Society: Oct. 10

Reading: AGR, pp. 38-50

B. Heracles as Savior: Oct. 12

Reading: Euripides, *Alcestis* (including the introduction)  
*Homeric Hymn to Heracles* (Sargent, p. 64)  
 RAGC, pp. 72-78; AGR 207-8

**Reading log due, Oct. 12**

C. Heracles as Madman: Oct. 17-19

Reading: Euripides, *Heracles* (including the introduction)

**Reading log due, Oct. 17**

III. Divinities and Festivals, 1: Demeter, Harvest, and the Eleusinian Mysteries

A. Harvest Festivals: Oct. 24

Reading: *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Sargent, pp. 2-14)  
 RAGC, pp. 46-62, 102-111

B. The Eleusinian Mysteries: Oct. 26

Reading: RAGC, pp. 132-140  
 AGR, pp. 78-85  
*Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (again)

**Reading log due, Oct. 26**

IV. Divinities and Festivals, 2: Dionysus, Ghosts, Theater, and Bacchants

A. Dionysus and his Festivals: Oct. 31

Reading: *Homeric Hymns to Dionysus* (Sargent, pp. 1, 55, 75)  
RAGC, pp. 198-207; review 28-39, 169-175 on sacrifice

B. Dionysus and Drama: Nov. 2-7

Reading: Euripides, *The Bacchae*  
RAGC, pp. 215-22  
AGR, pp. 85-92

**Reading log due, Nov. 2**

C. Essay Workshop: Nov. 9

**\*\*\*SECOND TAKE-HOME ESSAY DUE IN CLASS NOV. 14\*\*\***

V. Divinities and Festivals, 3: Athena, Apollo, the Family Drama, and the City

A. The Family Drama: Nov. 14-16

Reading: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (Play 1 of *The Oresteia*)  
“Introduction” to the Aeschylus volume, pp. 23-52

**Reading log due, Nov. 16**

Thanksgiving Break: Nov. 20-27

B. The Plot Thickens: Nov. 28

Reading: Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers* (Play 2 of *The Oresteia*)  
“Introduction” to the Aeschylus volume, pp. 53-70

**Reading log due, Nov. 28**

C. Athena, Apollo, and the Furies: Nov. 30-Dec. 5

Reading: Aeschylus, *The Eumenides* (Play 3 of *The Oresteia*)  
“Introduction” to the Aeschylus volume, pp. 71-97

**Reading log due, Nov. 30**

D. Wrap-up and Essay Workshop: Dec. 7

**\*\*\* THIRD TAKE-HOME ESSAY DUE, WED., DEC. 14 BY 4:30 p.m.  
in 501 Hall of Languages (there will be a box labeled REL 205) \*\*\***

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Classroom etiquette: Please arrive in class on time; lateness is disruptive for everyone. Please also be aware that once you arrive in class, you are expected to stay in class; if you leave for any reason during class, please do not return. Please turn off electronic devices and put them away; this includes computers, smart phones, cell phones, and so on.
2. Attendance: we will not record attendance. Please be aware, however, that if you do not attend class regularly, you will surely fail. The decision is up to you.
3. Reading the materials for each section of the course on time is required, and students are expected to engage in class discussions.
4. Three take-home essays are required. They are due on **Oct. 10, Nov. 14, and Dec. 14**. Each of these essays should be four to five pages in length, typed (double-spaced), with standard margins and font size (i.e., no larger than 12). No late submissions will be accepted, except in documented cases of medical emergencies. Each paper is worth one quarter of the final grade. Submit the papers in class, in hard copy, on the day on which they are due. Email submissions will not be accepted.

Topics will be handed out at least one week before the essays are due. The essays must reflect thorough knowledge of the course readings and an ability to analyze ancient texts in conversation with contemporary scholarly views and issues introduced in class. As you compose your essays, keep in mind that religions provide meaning in many different ways, for example, through mythic stories, ritual practices, artistic symbols, poetry, and so on. Also keep in mind that any given ancient text may have several different dimensions—theological, ethical, political, psychological, cosmological, and so on. How, you might ask yourself, do these dimensions relate to religion?

The Teaching Assistant will run an Essay Workshop prior to the due-date of each Take-home essay. Attendance at the Workshops is highly recommended. Skip them at your peril.

Please note: Your resources for writing these essays are all readings listed on the syllabus, plus notes from class lectures. Do not use any other materials, especially materials from websites. Any paper that uses materials other than those listed on the syllabus will receive a failing grade. Also: when you use the course readings, DO NOT PLAGIARIZE. Do not claim the thoughts of others as your own. If you quote or paraphrase a passage from one of these texts, use quotation marks and cite your source and page number. Questions? Consult <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

Please note: computer/printer problems are your responsibility and will not be accepted as excuses for late submissions. Plan ahead!

5. Reading logs are required. There are 10 (ten) possible reading log entries; you must do 8 (eight) of them; otherwise, you will lose credit for the entire assignment (this means that if you complete only seven of the logs, you will get no credit for any of them at all). You must submit reading log entries on the dates noted on the syllabus. Obviously, this is an important assignment—it is worth one quarter of your final grade. Each entry will be graded on a scale of 4 (A) to 0 (F). In the immortal words of Nike, “Just do it.” (If you wish to do all 10 log entries, I will select the 8 logs with the highest grades. A word to the wise: do them all.)
  
6. For each reading log entry, read the materials listed above the due date. Reading log entries are designed to enable you to identify and reflect upon the most important themes and issues in the ancient texts. Log entries must focus on the ancient texts, but they must also refer to scholarly analyses (RAGC, for example). Use the latter to help you in your reflections on the ancient texts. The idea is to weave (synthesize, integrate) the ancient and modern texts together. Here is one question that you can ask yourself after reading a particular ancient text: what sticks like a burr in my imagination? That is, what strikes you about a given text—a theme, an image, a ritual, a characterization of the gods or of human beings—that seems particularly significant for understanding the Greeks and their ways of being religious in the world? How does such an image, theme, etc., provide a focal point or an organizing motif for understanding a given text? Once you choose your topic, write about it as reflectively as you can, using information and ideas from RAGC, AGR, and introductions to ancient texts to help you formulate an ancient text’s significance.

Each entry must be one entire page in length, typed (double-spaced), with standard margins and font size. Entries will be collected on the due-dates, graded, and returned. Late entries will not be accepted for any reason other than serious illness, well documented. Submit reading logs in hard copy during the class when they are due. *Email submissions are not acceptable.* Computer/printer problems are your responsibility and will not be accepted as excuses for late submissions. Plan ahead!

### Academic Integrity

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu> Students found to cheat will receive an F for that assignment. Students have a right to appeal.

### Disability Accommodations

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>

### New Policy regarding Faith Tradition Observances

This fall is the first semester in which SU will not have non-instructional days for any religious holiday and the first semester in which students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes when they will be observing their religious holiday(s).

SU's religious observances policy, found at

[http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp\\_ben/religious\\_observance.htm](http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm)

recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance ***provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes***. Students will have access to a notification form through MySlice for two weeks beginning the first day of class. On Monday, September 12, instructors will have continuous access via a religious observances icon in Faculty Services/Faculty Center to a list of students in each class they are teaching who have provided notification.