

## REL 205: Ancient Greek Religion

Syracuse University, Fall 2017

<b><u>Time and Place:</u></b>	Tuesday/Thursday 2:00-3:20, Newhouse 1, Room 102
<b><u>Instructor:</u></b>	Virginia Burrus (mvburrus@syr.edu)
<b><u>Teaching Assistant:</u></b>	Abel Gomez (abgomez@syr.edu)
<b><u>Office hours:</u></b>	Prof. Burrus: Tues 3:30-4:30 or by appointment, 520 Hall of Languages Mr. Gomez: Thurs 12:45-1:45 or by appointment, 514 Hall of Languages

*"Everything is full of gods." (Thales, 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE)*

*"Many are the shapes of things divine." (Euripides, 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE)*

This course offers an introductory exploration of the world of thought, imagination, and practice that we 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.

One of the distinctive aspects of study of ancient religions is that they are, by definition, distant from our own experiences of religion. Roughly two and a half millennia separate us from the ancient Greeks. Nor (for the most part) are the *religious* traditions of ancient Greece seen to have been transmitted directly to any contemporary religious groups—though the influence of Greek *intellectual, political, and cultural* traditions is widely acknowledged. This confronts us with a number of opportunities and challenges. We are invited to engage the world of the ancient Greeks with imaginative sympathy, while at the same time maintaining critical distance. To do so should allow an encounter with difference that has the potential to change the way we understand religion and the role it plays in our own lives and world. Among the pervasive and profound differences that we will encounter is precisely the notion that "everything is full of gods"—a worldview that is polytheistic and that also does not understand religion to be separate or separable from other parts of life. One might even say that the Greeks do not recognize "religion" as such, or not in the sense most of us do.

The learning objective for this course, as for other courses in the Religion Department are:

- (1) to think both critically and imaginatively about the role of religion in human expression, thought, and social institutions both historically and in the present day.
- (2) to establish an understanding of the degree of religious diversity in the world both historically and today, along with an appreciation for the crucial role that religion has played in the course of human history.
- (3) to recognize the difficulties inherent in undertaking a coherent, disciplined study of religion, and to be aware of the diversity of perspectives within that study.
- (4) to demonstrate strong abilities to think and reason critically and to produce that thought in both verbal and written form.

## REQUIRED BOOKS

You are required to purchase five books (in print, not electronic format) for this course; all should be available at the campus bookstore. It is important that you have these exact editions and translations. (1) Jon D. Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion, Second Edition* (Wiley Blackwell, 2010); (2) Diana J. Rayor, translator, *The Homeric Hymns, Updated Edition* (University of California Press, 2014); Stanley Lombardo, translator, *Hesiod: Works and Days and Theogony* (Hackett, 1993); Anne Carson, translator, *Euripides: Bakkhai* (Oberon, 2015); and Anne Carson, translator, *An Oresteia: Agamemnon by Aiskhylos, Electra by Sophokles, Orestes by Euripides* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009). Other readings will be posted on Blackboard and marked **(B)** on the syllabus.

## REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS

- 1. Faithful attendance and active participation in class discussions.** Attend class regularly and read all assignments carefully. Come to each class ready to offer a question or comment; be sure also to bring the texts that we are discussing to class. Participation will count for **10% of the semester grade**. *You are allowed two absences without penalty (save them for when you really need them!); beyond that, barring truly exceptional circumstances, each absence will subtract one percentage point from your semester grade (separate from the participation grade).*
- 2. Reading quizzes.** For each class meeting for which readings are assigned, you may expect a very brief reading quiz at the beginning of class, consisting in (a) one random, focused (but not trivial) question about the reading and (b) one question about what aspect of the reading you found particularly intriguing. These will cumulatively count for **10% of the semester grade**. Each quiz will be graded pass/fail; you must pass 22 quizzes to receive an A+ for this part of your grade, 20 to receive an A, 18 to receive a B, 15 to receive a C, 13 to receive a D.
- 3. Performance of a hymn: partial group project.** We will open many of our classes with one to three brief hymns from the collection of *Homeric Hymns*. Sign up to read or chant or sing one of these, in groups of two or three; *on the day of your performance, each person must also turn in a one-page (roughly 300 word) analysis of some aspect of the language of the hymn that you find particularly striking.* (Please type your papers double-spaced.) This will count for **5% of the semester grade**.
- 4. Performance of a scene from a play: group project.** Group assignments, including assigned scenes, will be made by Sept 21. All groups will meet with Mr. Gomez to plan their approach to the assignment, at least 2 weeks before their performance date. No theater experience is required or expected! This will count for **15% of the semester grade**.
- 5. Three 2-to 3-page papers** (roughly 750 words each), due September 21, October 19, and November 17 respectively. (Please type your papers double-spaced.) The first will deal with elements of Greek religious cult generally, the second with a specific cult or cults, and the third with the play from which you are performing a scene. More detailed prompts and guidelines will be distributed at least two weeks before each paper is due. Each paper will count for 15%, for a total of **45% of the semester grade**.
- 6. Final project: profile of a god**, due December 11. More detailed prompts and guidelines are available on Blackboard. This will count for **15% of the final grade**.

## ACADEMIC COURTESY

All students are expected to follow simple rules of academic courtesy to fellow students and instructors. This includes being prepared for class, attending class from beginning to end without leaving (barring urgent need), listening when another speaks, respecting personal and intellectual differences, and generally abstaining from any actions not productively related to this course; *electronic devices such as computers, tablets, and cell phones must be turned off and stowed away*. Anyone who fails to follow these guidelines may, at the discretion of the instructor, be asked to leave class for the day and will be counted absent.

## TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

- T, 8/29      Introduction  
\*Hymn to Gaia (#30)
- Th, 8/31      Overview: Greek Sanctuaries and Worship  
\*Hymn to Poseidon (#22)  
  
*Ancient Greek Religion*, ch. 1 (pp 2-26).
- T, 9/5      Overview, Continued: Gods and Heroes  
\*Hymn to Athena (#11), \*Hymn to Heracles (#15)  
  
With last week's topic in mind, visit Hendrix Chapel or some other place of worship and be ready to compare it to ancient Greek sanctuaries in class discussion.  
  
*Ancient Greek Religion*, ch. 2 and 3 (pp 32-63)
- Th, 9/7      The Early Myth-Makers (800-600BCE): Hesiod  
\*Hymn to the Muses, Apollo, and Zeus (#25), \*Hymn to Helios (#31),  
\*Hymn to Selene (#32)  
  
*Hesiod: Works & Days and Theogony* (Introduction: pp 1-8, 12-16; *Theogony*: pp 61-90)
- T, 9/12      The Early Myth-Makers (800-600 BCE): Homer  
\*Hymn to Hephaistos (#20), Hymn to Ares (#8)  
  
Selections from the *Iliad* in *Greek Religion: A Sourcebook* (pp 22-33) (B)
- Th, 9/14      Worship and the Senses: Music, Art, and Movement  
\*Hymn to Aphrodite (#10), \*Hymn to Hermes (#18), \*Hymn to Hestia and Hermes (#29)  
  
*Homeric Hymns*, Introduction (pp 1-13) and (long) Hymns to Hermes and Aphrodite (pp 55-86), Hymn to Pan (pp 94-95)

- T, 9/19      The Cult of Athena: Religion and Civic Life (Athens)  
 \* Hymn to Athena (#28)  
                   *Ancient Greek Religion*, pp 68-78, 150-167, Plates 1-3
- Th, 9/21      Discuss Parthenon  
**Essay #1 due**
- T, 9/26      The Cult of Demeter and the Mysteries (Eleusis)  
 \*Hymn to Demeter (#13), \*Hymn to the Mother of the Gods (#14)  
                   *Ancient Greek Religion*, pp 78-85, Hymn to Demeter (*Homeric Hymns*, pp 17-34)
- Th, 9/28      "The Thesmophoria," in *Greek Religion: A Sourcebook*, pp 125-129 (B);  
 selections from Aristophanes, *Women at the Thesmophoria* (B)
- T, 10/3      The Cult of Apollo and Oracles (Delphi)  
 \*Hymn to Apollo (#21), \*Hymn to Artemis (#9), \*Hymn to Artemis (#27), \*Hymn to  
 Asclepius (#16), \*Hymn to Hestia (#24)  
                   *Ancient Greek Religion*, pp 92-102; "Divination," in *Greek Religion: A Sourcebook*  
 (pp 75-94) (B)
- Th, 10/5      Hymn to Apollo (*Homeric Hymns*, pp 35-53)
- T, 10/10      The Cult of Zeus and the Games (Olympus)  
 \*Hymn to Zeus (#23), \*Hymn to Hera (#12), \*Hymn to the Dioskouroi (#17)  
 \*Hymn to the Dioskouroi (#33)  
                   *Ancient Greek Religion*, pp 102-118
- Th, 10/12      Readings on the Olympic Games, tba
- T, 10/17      The Cult of Dionysus and Drama (Thebes and Athens)  
 \*Hymn to Dionysus (#26)  
                   *Ancient Greek Religion*, pp 85-92, 219-223; (longer) Hymn to Dionysius (*Homeric*  
*Hymns*, pp 87-89)
- Th, 10/19      Discuss Greek tragedy  
**Essay #2 due**
- T, 10/24      Euripides, *Bakkhai*  
                   *Bakkhai*, pp 13-41  
**Group 1 performs scene**
- Th, 10/26      *Bakkhai*, pp 41-71  
**Group 2 performs scene**

- T, 10/31      Aiskhylos, *Aqamemnon*  
                     *An Oresteia*, pp 1-36  
**Group 3 performs scene**
- Th, 11/2            *An Oresteia*, pp 36-74  
**Group 4 performs scene**
- T, 11/7            Sophokles, *Elektra*  
                     *An Oresteia*, pp 75-127  
**Group 5 performs scene**
- Th, 11/9            *An Oresteia*, pp 127-172  
**Group 6 performs scene**
- T, 11/14           Euripides, *Orestes*  
                     *An Oresteia*, pp 173-212  
**Group 7 performs scene**
- Th, 11/16           *An Oresteia*, pp 212-255  
**Group 8 performs scene**
- Fri, 11/17        **Essay # 3 due** (email to both Burrus and Gomez)

**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

- T, 11/28           Current views: Animal Sacrifice and Ancient Greek Religion  
                     Kimberley Patton, "Animal Sacrifice" (2006), pp 391-403 (B)  
                     Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am" (2008), pp 25-27 (B)
- Th, 11/30           Current views: Wonder Woman and Ancient Greek Myth  
                     Readings tba
- T, 12/5            Contemporary Paganism (Abel Gomez)  
                     Readings tba
- Th, 12/7           Wrap-up discussion: Polytheism!  
                     \*Hymn to Xenoi (#34)
- Mon, 12/11       **God profile due** (email to both Burrus and Gomez)

## **ABSENCE DUE TO OBSERVANCE OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS**

Syracuse University does not have non-instructional days for the observance of any religious holiday. However, we will provide an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirement that is missed because of an absence due to a religious observance, provided the instructor has been notified no later than the end of the second week of classes.

## **DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS**

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), located at 804 University Avenue, Room 309; call 315-443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters. Students should submit 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, it is crucial to contact ODS and plan for accommodations as early as possible. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>

## **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 course-specific expectations, as well as university policy. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

In this course, the minimal penalty for any student found to cheat on an assignment is an F for that assignment; major violations will result in course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of Academic Integrity Policy; repeat offenses can result in even more serious sanctions.