

## REL 332-1 | Ancient Greek Mythology and Religion Spring 2025

**Instructor: Nina Papathanasopoulou**  
**Email: [nina.papath@cyathens.org](mailto:nina.papath@cyathens.org)**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

**Myth and Religion** offers an introduction to the religion and myths of the ancient Greeks, largely based upon the written words of the ancient Greek themselves. The course will study a selection of important Greek mythological stories and figures as represented in Greek literature and art, beginning with selections from the earliest extant Greek literature – Homer, Hesiod, and the Homeric Hymns, and moving on to reading selections of Greek drama. From these readings we shall attempt to understand the Greek cosmogony and the place of gods and humans within it. While studying myth, we will address Greek religion as an integral part of the ancient Greek *polis*. During the course students will become proficient in a variety of methods of analysis and interpretation of these myths; critically engage with select scholarship; and study the role of myth in helping individuals and communities organize their understanding of the world. Through research, writing, and daily in-class analysis, students will engage with key issues treated by the myths: these include the role of the divine, gender conflict, personal and communal identity, the consequences of war, human and divine justice, self-sacrifice, political ambition, and the societal roles of women, slaves, and foreigners. The course treats the ancient material, as well as representations of these myths in the visual and performing arts.

The first part of the class will consist of a combination of lecture and discussion.

Students will be required to have prepared questions related to the readings and will be asked to engage in conversation concerning the myths discussed. In the second part of the class I will show slides with visual representations of the myths (on pottery, temples, tombs, etc.) and/or look at the way in which these myths have been received in modern times, and rendered into different kinds of artwork. Students will thus become familiar with many sources of these myths and gain a deeper understanding of the relevance of these myths for society today.

The course includes **field trips** to the Acropolis and its museum, the Theater of Dionysus, and the sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis. **One of the field trips takes place on a Friday and is a mandatory component of the class.**

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**This course will primarily teach students to:**

- Identify and explain the value of Greek mythology both for the ancients and our world today.
- Use textual and material evidence to analyze Greek thought.
- Analyze and evaluate the diverse ways in which ancient authors used myths to explore problems of their time.
- Examine the way Greek myths inform our understanding of Greek religion.
- Analyze and evaluate the diverse ways in which certain modern and contemporary artists used or use myths to explore issues of their time.
- Reflect on and compare the different means of communications used to convey mythological stories and to highlight human issues.
- Recognize the influence of Classical Mythology in our world today and gain a deeper appreciation of performances, artwork, and other creative expression based on Classical myths.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT**

- **Class Contribution 25%** – Class Contribution includes physical and mental presence in the classroom, arriving on time, preparation, participation in class discussions, and posting occasionally on the moodle forum. Reading assignments are to be completed before each class session. Class contribution is one of the most important factors for determining your grade for the semester. I expect all of you to come prepared, engage in our discussions, ask questions, and voice your opinions in class. If you are extremely uncomfortable speaking in front of a large group of students, you may send your opinions or afterthoughts in writing via email. If you never participate in class and do not send any thoughts by email, your contribution grade will be low.
- **Midterm Exam 20%** – Identification of maps and important locations; identification of key figures and term; passage identification and analysis; image identification and analysis.
- **One Written Assignments 15%** – Topics and instructions will be given in advance. Close analysis of passages required. 4-5 pages.
- **Final Project 15%** - Final projects may include: dramatic reading, recitation, acting out of a passage/scene; creatively writing a mythical scene/passage; making a video of a retelling/acting out of a scene; making an iMovie trailer for one of the myths or mythical figures; giving an oral presentation with a PowerPoint slideshow of the visual

representations of a myth/figure; creating your own visual representation of a mythical figure/scene; your own creative idea. All projects must be accompanied by a one page commentary or reflection on your project (about 400 words).

• **Final Exam 25%** – Identification of key figures and terms, passage analysis, image analysis, evaluation of select myths and issues, and essay questions.

**POLICY ON ASSIGNMENTS AND MAKE-UP WORK**

Details about assignments and exams will be given in advance. I will accept no late assignments or make-up exams unless discussed with me in advance. If you are unable to come to class, please let me know beforehand.

**CYA POLICIES AND REGULATIONS**

**CYA Attendance Policy**

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential, so attendance at all scheduled meetings is required. Absences are recorded and have consequences.

**ePolicy on Original Work**

Plagiarism is literary theft. As such, it is a serious offense which will not be tolerated either at your home institution or at CYA. Plagiarism on an examination or in a paper will result in an F for the course. You must cite the author of any and all ideas that you use that is neither common knowledge nor your own idea. If you are in doubt, it is safest to cite the source.

**Use of Laptops**

In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course- related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work.

**Academic Accommodations**

If you are a registered (with your home institution) student with a disability and you are entitled to learning accommodation, please inform the Office of Academic Affairs and make sure that your school forwards the necessary documentation.

**REQUIRED TEXTS/READINGS**

- 1) Hesiod’s *Theogony and Works and Days*. Translated by S. Lombardo. Hackett, 1993.
- 2) Aeschylus, *Oresteia*. Translated by Peter Meineck. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998.
- 3) Athanassakis, Apostolos N., trans. *The Homeric Hymns*. 2nd edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- 4) Burkert, Walter. *Greek religion: archaic and classical*. Translated by John Raffan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1985.
- 5) Easterling, P.E., and J.V. Muir, eds. *Greek Religion and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- 6) Homer. *The Iliad of Homer*. Translated by Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- 7) Homer. *The Odyssey*. Translated by Emily Wilson. New York: W.W. Norton, 2018.
- 8) Sophocles’ *The Theban Plays*. Translated by Meineck and Woodruff. Hackett, ,2003.
- 9) *Euripides I*, ed. Grene and Lattimore. Chicago University Press (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), 2013.
- 10) *Euripides’ Bacchae*. Translated by Paul Woodruff. Hackett, 1999.

**TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE – SPRING 2025 - MW**

Day #	Date/Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due / Place (if applicable)
	<b>Jan 23-25</b>	<b>Field Study   Delphi and Ancient Olympia</b>
1	Jan 27	Introduction to the course; Definitions of Myth; Myth and Religion
2	Jan 29	Historical and Geographical Overview; Theories and Approaches to myth; Greek Religion; the Olympian Deities; polytheism Reading: Burkert 216-219; Gould “On Making Sense of Greek Religion” in Easterling: 1-33
3	Feb 3	<b>GREEK COSMOLOGY</b> <b>Zeus</b> and the Divine Order; <b>Poseidon</b> – Greek Sanctuaries & Temples Reading: Hesiod, <i>Theogony</i> 1-210; 456-508; 621-969 Recommended: Burkert 125-31 (Zeus); 136-39 (Poseidon); Burkert 84- 92; Coldstream “Greek Temples: Why and Where?” in Easterling 67-98
4	Feb 5	Origins of <b>Humans</b> and <b>Prometheus</b> – Sacrifice Reading: Hesiod, <i>Theogony</i> 509-620; Aeschylus’ <i>Prometheus Bound</i> Recommended: Burkert 55-9 (sacrifice); J-P. Vernant, “Hesiod’s Myth of the Races”

5	Feb 10	Origins of <b>Women</b> and <b>Pandora</b> – Women in Antiquity Reading: Hesiod, <i>Works and Days</i> 58-128; <i>Theogony</i> 573-620; Semonides 7 Recommended: Blondell, "The Problem of Female Beauty"
6	Feb 12	<b>GREEK GODS AND GODDESSES</b> Sex and Virginity: <b>Aphrodite</b> Reading: Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite; Burkert 152-56 (Aphrodite) Recommended: C. Segal (1974), " <i>Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite: A Structuralist Approach</i> "
7	Feb 17	Civilization and Transition: <b>Apollo and Hermes</b> Reading: <i>Homeric Hymn to Hermes</i> and <i>Homeric Hymn to Apollo</i> ; Burkert 114-118 (Oracles); 143-149 (Apollo); 156-159 (Hermes)
	<b>Feb 18-21</b>	<b>Field Study   Peloponnese</b>
8	Feb 24	Wisdom and War: <b>Athena (Acropolis FIELD TRIP)</b> Reading: <i>Iliad</i> 5.1-8; 114-43; 733-864; 22.158-305; <i>Odyssey</i> 1.1-220; 13.187-250; Burkert 139-43 (Athena) Recommended: Panos Valavanis (2004), "The Panathenaia and Athena" <b>*SITE VISIT ACROPOLIS &amp; PARTHENON*-MEET ACROPOLIS MAIN ENTRANCE 8.45AM</b>
9	Feb 26	Wilderness, the City, and Transitions: <b>Artemis; Hero Cults</b> Reading: Burkert 149-52 (Artemis); Vikela (2008), "The Worship of Artemis in Attica: Cult Places, Rites, Iconography", Ekroth (2010), "Heroes and Hero-Cults"
10	Feb 28	Life and Death: <b>Demeter, Persephone, and Hades</b> Reading: <i>Homeric Hymn to Demeter</i> ; Burkert 159-161 (Demeter); 285- 290 (Eleusinian mysteries) <b>*SITE VISIT TO THE SANCTUARY OF DEMETER AT ELEUSIS* FIELD TRIP: 8.30-1pm</b>
11	Mar 5	Freedom and Ritual: <b>Dionysus</b> – First Written Assignment Due Reading: Euripides, <i>Bacchae</i> ; Burkert 161-167; 223-5
12	Mar 10	Theater as Healing: <b>Dionysus and Asclepius (Theater FIELD TRIP)</b> Recommended: Cartledge (1997), "Deep Plays: theatre as process in Greek civic life" <b>*SITE VISIT TO THE THEATER OF DIONYSUS AND THE ACROPOLIS MUSEUM* - MEET AT THEATER OF DIONYSUS ENTRANCE AT 8.45AM</b>
13	<b>Mar 12</b>	<b>Midterm Exam</b>
14	Mar 17	<b>MYTHS OF SOCIAL ORIGINS</b> The House of <b>Atreus</b> and Myths of Matriarchy – Sacrifice and Omens Reading: Aeschylus' <i>Agamemnon</i>
	<b>Mar 18-22</b>	<b>Field Study   Northern Greece</b>
15	Mar 24	The House of Atreus – Avenging Spirits and Divine Justice Reading: Aeschylus' <i>Choephoroi</i> and <i>The Furies</i> Recommended: F. Zeitlin (1978) "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth & Mythmaking in the <i>Oresteia</i> "
16	Mar 26	<b>GREEK HEROES AND HEROINES</b> <b>Theseus and Heracles</b> – Heroic Cults Reading: Apollodorus on Theseus (p.54-7) and Heracles (p.33-45); Heracles handout
17	Mar 31	<b>Achilles</b> – Semi-Divine Heroes; Superhuman Powers Reading: <i>Iliad</i> 1, 6, 9, 16, 18-19; 22; Burkert 119-125 "Spell of Homer"
18	Apr 2	<b>Odysseus</b> – Gods and Humans; Immortality; Defining Humans Reading: <i>Odyssey</i> 1.1-10, 5, 9-12
19	Apr 7	<b>Oedipus</b> – Miasma, Fate, Prophecy, Hubris Reading: Sophocles' <i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>
20	Apr 9	NO CLASS (trip to Eleusis instead) – Group Project on Greek Heroes due (Theseus, Herakles, Achilles, Odysseus, Oedipus)
	<b>Apr 11-21</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>
	Apr 23	Traits of a Greek Heroine; <b>Helen</b> and <b>Penelope</b> Reading: <i>Iliad</i> 3; <i>Odyssey</i> 19, 22, 23
21	Apr 28	<b>Medea</b> Reading: Euripides' <i>Medea</i>
22	Apr 30	<b>Medea today; Contemporary Adaptations</b> Reading: Martha Graham's <i>Cave of the Heart</i> , and Cherubini's opera Recommended: Papatanasopoulou, "Serpent Heart"
23	May 5	Group Final Projects – Student Presentations
24	May 7	Review Session; Final Reflections on Myth and Religion
<b>FEW</b>	<b>May 12</b>	<b>Final Exam 9.30am</b>

**COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- M. J. Anderson, 'Myth', in J. Gregory (ed.) *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*. (Blackwell 2005), 119–135.
- P. Burian, "Myth into *muthos*," in P.E. Easterling (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997), 178–208.
- W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*. Translated in English (Blackwell 1985).
- R. G. A. Buxton, R. G. A. *Myths and tragedies in their ancient Greek contexts*. First edition. (Oxford 2013), 121-144.
- P. Cartledge, "Deep plays': theatre as process in Greek civic life," in P.E. Easterling (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997), 3–35.
- N. Croally, 'Tragedy's Teaching', in J. Gregory (ed.) *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Blackwell 2005), 55–70.
- E. Csapo and M.C. Miller (eds.), *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama*, (Cambridge 2007).
- M. Detienne, *Dionysos Slain*. Translation of *Dionysos mis à mort* (Baltimore 1979).
- E.R. Dodds, "Maenadism in the Bacchae", *The Harvard Theological Review* 33 (no.3), 1940, 155-176.
- E.R. Dodds, *Euripides' Bacchae* (Oxford 1960).
- P.E. Easterling, "A show for Dionysus," in P.E. Easterling (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997), pp. 36–53.
- M. Ewans, *Aeschylus: The Oresteia*. (The Everyman Library, London 1995).
- P.J. Finglass, *Sophocles' Ajax* (Cambridge 2011).
- S. Goldhill, "The audience of Athenian tragedy," in P.E. Easterling (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997), 54–68.
- S. Goldhill, "The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology" in J. J. Winkler and F.I. Zeitlin (eds.) *Nothing to do with Dionysos?* (Princeton 1990).
- D. W. Graham 'The Early Ionian Philosophers', in J. Warren and F. Sheffield (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Ancient Philosophy* (Routledge 2014), 48–63.
- M. Griffith, "'Telling the tale': a performing tradition from Homer to pantomime," in M. McDonald and M. Walton (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre* (Cambridge 2007), 13–35.
- M. Griffith, *Sophocles' Antigone* (Cambridge 1999).
- M. Griffith, *The Authenticity of Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge 1977).
- E. Hall, *Introducing the ancient Greeks* (London 2014).
- E. Hall, *Greek tragedy: suffering under the sun* (Oxford 2010).
- E. Hall, "The sociology of Athenian tragedy," in P.E. Easterling (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997), 93–126.
- E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian. Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford 1989).
- A. Henricks, "Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard", *HSCP* 88, 1984, 205–40.
- J. Kindt (ed.), *Animals in ancient Greek religion* (Routledge 2020).
- G.S. Kirk, *The nature of Greek myths* (Penguin 1974).
- G.S. Kirk, *Myth: its meaning and functions in ancient and other cultures* (Cambridge and Berkeley 1970).
- D. Konstan, "The Tragic Emotions", *Comparative Drama* 33 (no. 1), 1999, 1-2.
- A. Laks, et al. *Early Greek philosophy*. Volume II, in *Beginnings and early Ionian thinkers*. Part 1 / edited and translated by A. Laks and G. W. Most (Cambridge, MA 2016).
- H. Mackie, *Talking Trojan: Speech and Community in the Iliad*. (Rowman & Littlefield 1996).
- N. Papatheanopoulos, "Poreia Theatre's *Prometheus Bound*," *Didaskalia: The Journal for Ancient Performance* 16.05, 2022.
- C. Pelling, "Tragedy, Rhetoric, and Performance Culture", in J. Gregory (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Blackwell 2005), 83–102.
- A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*. 2nd ed. Revised by J. Gould, and D. M. Lewis, Reissued with supplement and corrections (Oxford 1988).
- R. Rehm, *Understanding Greek Tragic Theatre* (Routledge 2017).
- I. Ruffell, *Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound* (Bloomsbury 2012).
- S. Saïd, A. Nevill, "Greeks and Barbarians in Euripides' Tragedies: The End of Differences?" in T. Harrison (ed.) *Greeks And Barbarians* (Edinburgh 2002), 62–100.
- S. Schein, *Sophocles' Philoctetes*. Cambridge 2013.
- R. A. S. Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual* (Oxford 1994).
- R. A. S. Seaford, *Euripides' Bacchae* (Warminster 1996).
- R. A. S. Seaford, *Dionysos*. (Routledge 2006).
- C. Segal, "The Menace of Dionysus: Sex Roles and Reversals in Euripides' *Bacchae*", *Arethusa* 11, 1978, 185-202.
- J.P. Small, "Pictures of Tragedy?", in J. Gregory (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Blackwell 2005), 103–118.
- C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *Tragedy and Athenian religion. Greek studies*. (Lanham, MD 2003).
- W. Stanford, *Greek Tragedy and the Emotions* (Routledge 1983).
- O. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Routledge 1978).
- J. P. Vernant, *Myth and thought among the Greeks*. Translated in English. (New York 2006).
- J. P. Vernant, & P. Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and tragedy in ancient Greece*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. (New York 1990).
- D. Wiles, *Mask and performance in Greek tragedy: from ancient festival to modern experimentation*. (Cambridge 2007).