

REL 332-1 | Ancient Greek Mythology and Religion Fall 2026

Course Instructor: Nina Papathanasopoulou
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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 **fields trips** to the Acropolis and its museum and the Theater of Dionysus. We may also go to a theater performance. Details to be given closer to the date.

Learning Goals

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

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. All absences are recorded and have consequences that may affect your grade. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office, via the form available in the Student Portal.

Class Contribution 25% – Class Contribution includes physical and mental presence in the classroom, arriving on time, preparation, participation in class discussions, posting occasionally on the Moodle forum, and assessment of the group project on Greek Heroes. 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, passages, characters, situations, themes, symbols, and ritual practices; passage analysis; and evaluation of select myths and issues.

One Written Assignment 15% – Topics and instructions will be given in advance. 4-5 pages.

Group Heroes Project 15% - This project will include making a table of all male and female heroes we have studied, with information on their main characteristics, values, origin, and their relationship to their family, community, and the divine. Each group must choose one more category to include or one more hero to discuss. Further details will be given in class.

Final Exam 25% – Identification, passage analysis, evaluation of select myths and issues, and essay questions.

CYA Policies and Regulations

CYA Attendances and Absences policy

Coursework at CYA involves a great deal of experiential learning: classroom discussion, site visits, and the like, which cannot be replicated if the student is absent. Grades reflect a student's performance on assessments, but also acknowledge the degree to which a student has mastered the material through such active learning activities. As a result attendance and punctuality are essential to learning in CYA courses, which rely on in-class and on-site interaction. If you are unable to come to class, please let me know beforehand. Students **must** make up missed work for any absence (excused or unexcused) and communicate with instructors about requirements. Failure to complete missed work will result in the reduction of minimum one letter grade. For an absence to be excused you must follow the CYA policy for excused absences, contacting either Student Affairs or the Academic Director. Three (3) unexcused absences automatically lowers the final course grade.

Policy on Assignments/Exams 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.

AI Policy

I discourage students from using AI on the written assignments submitted for this course. If students do use AI on assignments, students must disclose their AI usage. Failure to disclose how AI has been used, or submission of AI work as one's own, is a violation of academic integrity [see relevant section on student handbook].

Academic Accommodations

Students are required to submit an official letter from the office at their school that handles academic accommodations (generally the Office of Disability Services), or to have that office send a letter. Students who have submitted such a letter to CYA should also talk to their professors individually to discuss how these accommodations will work in each specific course.

Site Visits and Accessibility

This course contains specific physical and spatial elements that are crucial to student learning and which cannot be modified. Students should be aware of these before enrolling in the course. In particular, the course includes 2 field trips to archaeological sites and museums. During these trips students will be required to walk on streets and uneven terrain occasionally without shade or seating.

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.

Your work should be original and reflect your own ideas and thoughts. If you are unsure about what counts as original work, please consult your professor and check the Student Handbook.

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.

Upgrade to 400-level course

Courses can be upgraded to a 400-level. This constitutes usually 25% additional work on the part of the student. The option to upgrade opens the second week of classes. If you are interested in this option, please talk to your professor.

Required 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 (3rd edition), 2013.
10. *Euripides' Bacchae*. Translated by Paul Woodruff. Hackett, 1999.

Fall 2026 Tentative Schedule – REL 332 – SECTION 1 - MW

Day #	Date/Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due / Place (if applicable)
	Sept. 3-5	Field Study Delphi and Ancient Olympia
1	Sept. 7	Introduction to the course; Definitions of Myth; Myth and Religion
2	Sept. 9	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	Sept. 14	GREEK COSMOLOGY Zeus and the Divine Order; Poseidon – 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	Sept. 16	Origins of Humans and Prometheus – Sacrifice Reading: Hesiod, <i>Works and Days</i> 1-234; Hesiod, <i>Theogony</i> 509-620; Aeschylus' <i>Prometheus Bound</i> 1-517 Recommended: Burkert 55-9 (sacrifice); J-P. Vernant, "Hesiod's Myth of the Races"
	Sept. 17-19	Field Study Crete
5	Sept. 21	Origins of Women and Pandora – 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	Sept. 23	GREEK GODS AND GODDESSES Sex and Virginity: Aphrodite Reading: Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite; Burkert 152-56 (Aphrodite) Recommended: C. Segal (1974), "Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite: A Structuralist Approach"
7	Sept. 28	Civilization and Transition: Apollo and Hermes Reading: <i>Homeric Hymn to Hermes</i> and <i>Homeric Hymn to Apollo</i> ; Burkert 114-118 (Oracles); 143-149 (Apollo); 156-159 (Hermes)
8	Sept. 30	Wisdom and War: Athena (Acropolis FIELD TRIP) 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" *SITE VISIT ACROPOLIS & PARTHENON*-MEET ACROPOLIS MAIN ENTRANCE 11AM
9	Oct. 5	Life and Death: Demeter, Persephone, and Hades Reading: <i>Homeric Hymn to Demeter</i> ; Burkert 159-161 (Demeter); 285-290 (Eleusinian mysteries)

	Oct. 8-10	Field Study Peloponnese
10	Oct. 12	Freedom and Ritual: Dionysus Reading: Euripides, <i>Bacchae</i> ; Burkert 161-167; 223-5
11	Oct. 14	Wilderness, the City, and Transitions: Artemis Reading: Burkert 149-52 (Artemis); Vikela (2008), "The Worship of Artemis in Attica: Cult Places, Rites, Iconography" First Written Assignment Due Oct. 15
12	Oct. 19	Theater as Healing: Dionysus and Asclepius (Theater FIELD TRIP) Recommended: Cartledge (1997), "Deep Plays: theatre as process in Greek civic life" *SITE VISIT TO THE THEATER OF DIONYSUS AND THE ACROPOLIS MUSEUM* - MEET AT THEATER OF DIONYSUS ENTRANCE AT 11AM
13	Oct. 21	Midterm Exam
	Oct. 23-31	Fall Break
14	Nov. 2	MYTHS OF SOCIAL ORIGINS The House of Atreus and Myths of Matriarchy – Sacrifice and Omens Reading: Aeschylus' <i>Agamemnon</i>
15	Nov. 4	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	Nov. 9	GREEK HEROES AND HEROINES Theseus and Heracles – Hero Cults Reading: Apollodorus on Theseus (p.54-7) and Heracles (p.33-45); Heracles handout; Ekroth (2010), "Heroes and Hero-Cults"
	Nov. 11-14	Field Trip – Abroad
17	Nov. 16	Achilles – Semi-Divine Heroes; Superhuman Powers Reading: <i>Iliad</i> 1, 9, 16, 18-19; 22; Burkert 119-125 "Spell of Homer"
18	Nov. 18	Odysseus – Gods and Humans; Immortality; Defining Humans Reading: <i>Odyssey</i> 1.1-10, 5-8
19	Nov. 23	Odysseus – Gods and Humans; Immortality; Defining Humans Reading: <i>Odyssey</i> 9-12
20	Nov. 25	Oedipus – Miasma, Fate, Prophecy, Hubris Reading: Sophocles' <i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>
	Nov. 26-29	Thanksgiving Break
21	Nov. 30	Traits of a Greek Heroine; Helen and Penelope Reading: <i>Iliad</i> 3; <i>Odyssey</i> 19, 22, 23
22	Dec. 2	Medea Reading: Euripides' <i>Medea</i> Group Project on Greek Heroes due Dec. 3
23	Dec. 7	Medea today; Contemporary Adaptations Reading: Martha Graham's <i>Cave of the Heart</i> , and Cherubini's opera Recommended: Ppathanasopoulou (2021), "Serpent Heart"
24	Dec. 9	Review Session; Reflections on Myth and Religion
FEW	Dec. 14-17	Final Exam 9.30am

Course Bibliography (Required and Supplementary Readings)

M. J. Anderson, 'Myth', in J. Gregory (ed.) *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*. (Blackwell 2005), 119–135.
 R. Blondell, *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation* (Oxford 2013).
 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. Papathanasopoulou, "Serpent Heart: Animality, Jealousy and Transgression in Martha Graham's Medea", *IJCT* 28 (Vol.2), 2019, 159-182.
- N. Papathanasopoulou, "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. Said, 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).