

Anthropology/Religion 225

Gods, Heroes, Magic, and Mysteries: Religion in Ancient Greece

Bates College -- Winter, 1996
Robert W. Allison and Loring M. Danforth



Infrastructure

How This Electronic Syllabus Works

This syllabus is enriched with links to [the Perseus Project's World Wide Web site](#). Look up the Perseus editions of the required readings. The Perseus versions are equipped with helps linked to highlighted key words in the readings. Some of these highlighted terms connect you instantly to on-line encyclopedia entries, while others lead you to what other ancient authors have said about the same subject. You can follow these leads where ever your own personal curiosity might lead you, and to find information on any subject which you might like to pursue as a research paper topic. Electronic resources also allow you to cut and paste quotations and illustrations from the text directly into your research papers as you draft them on your word processor. (Don't forget your responsibilities for citing sources and giving credit when you do this!)

For an introduction to Perseus and for on line help using it, take a look at [Perseus at Bates](#).



Course Objectives

The present course is a study of ancient Greek religion from both a historical and an anthropological perspective. It follows a broadly historical outline and covers these important topics and periods:

- Religion in Minoan and Mycenaean Culture
(the bronze age on Crete and in the Aegean basin:
ca. 2700-1100 B.C.E.)
- Religion in the "Heroic Age" as reflected in Homer and Hesiod
(the bronze age on the mainland of Greece:
ca. 1100-750 B.C.E.)
- Religion in the Classical Age of skepticism and rationality
(the "Golden age" of Athens, 6th-4th c. B.C.E.)

- Religion in the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman periods

(the period of westward movement of foreign or "diaspora" religions into the Greco-Roman world,
2nd c. B.C.E.-2nd c. C.E.)

At the same time this course takes an anthropological approach to the study of religion in ancient Greece. It attempts to understand religion as a system of symbols which provides people with a meaningful world in which to live. It also seeks to explore how religions enable people to legitimate their view of the world by setting it in the context of a reality which transcends them.

From a historical perspective, the primary objectives of this course are

1. to become familiar with central religious concepts of each of the periods outlined above and how they relate to the social, political and economic conditions of their times;
2. to learn what sources are available to us for the study of religion in ancient Greece;
3. to learn how to utilize these sources critically, that is, how to recognize what kinds of conclusions the evidence will support. The sources available to us include archaeological, iconic (pictorial) and literary evidence. Literary sources (such as Homer's Iliad or Euripides' play, The Bacchae) may be studied as evidence either for religious ideas of the time in which they were written, or for the time which the literary sources themselves describe;
4. to learn how to draw analogies between religious ideas of our own culture and those of foreign ones (in this case, those of Ancient Minoans, Myceneans, and Greeks) while resisting the tendency to allow our own values and beliefs to color our reading of the evidence.

From an anthropological perspective, the primary objectives of this course are:

1. to serve as an introduction to the way in which anthropologists attempt to understand cultures very different from our own;
2. to understand different religions as attempts to "say something" about the relationships between human beings and their gods;
3. to learn how to analyze religious symbols, institutions, beliefs, and practices in their wider socio-cultural context. These include myth, sacrifice, conversion, death rituals, healing rituals, rites of passage, trance and possession, and beliefs about the soul and life after death;
4. to appreciate the power of other religions as well as the beauty of the art and literature they inspire.



Using Perseus to Achieve These Objectives

The wider our exposure to ancient evidence, the better equipped we are to do justice to ancient Greek thinking. Perseus is a superb resource for widening our exposure to ancient Greek thinking and religious experience. For example, several World Wide Web-based Perseus tools enable us to find instantly a wide range of evidence on any subject we might want to pursue in our reading:

- [Perseus editions of ancient Greek literature](#)
- [Perseus English-Greek Word Search](#)
- [English Index to Perseus 2](#)

Perseus is also available on the Bates College network in two versions. Perseus 1.0, the original

version, and the new Perseus 2.0. Since the College is a beta-testing institution for Perseus 2.0, we will be using its greatly expanded resources in this course. For information:

- [Introduction to Perseus at Bates](#)
- [Tutorial on using Perseus at Bates](#)



Required Books

1. Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (R. Graves, ed.)
2. Euripides, *The Bakkhai* (R. Bagg, ed.) or [Perseus On Line ed.](#)
3. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*
4. Hesiod, *Theogony* (N.O. Brown, ed.) or [Perseus On Line ed.](#)
5. Homer, *The Iliad* (R. Lattimore, ed.) or [Perseus On Line ed.](#)
6. Rice & Stambaugh, *Sources for the Study of Greek Religion*
7. Starr, *The Ancient Greeks*



Reserve Readings

1. Athanasakis, *The Homeric Hymns* (see also the [Perseus On Line edition](#))
2. Bolton, *Aristeas of Proconnesus*
3. Chadwick, *The Mycenaean World*
4. Crapanzano, *Saints, Jnun, and Dreams: An Essay in Moroccan Ethnopsychology*
5. Danforth, *Firewalking and Religious Healing*
6. Edelstein, *Asclepius*
7. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*
8. Homer, *The Odyssey* (see the [Perseus On Line edition](#))
9. Hubert & Mauss, *Sacrifice*
10. Kallimachos, *Hymn to Zeus*
11. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*
12. Lessa and Vogt, *Reader in Comparative Religion*
13. Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology, Part I*
14. Mylonas, *Eleusis*
15. Marinatos, *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image, and Symbol*
16. Parke, *The Delphic Oracle*
17. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*
18. Plato, *The Republic* (See the [Perseus On Line edition](#)).
19. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*
20. Rice & Stambaugh, *Sources for the Study of Greek Religion*
21. Sargent, *The Homeric Hymns* (see also the [Perseus On Line edition](#))
22. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*
23. Wace, A.J.B. & Stubbings, F.H., *A Companion to Homer*



Calendar of Topics and Readings

1. Introduction

Jan 8 (M) Method and Theory in the Interdisciplinary Study of Ancient Greek Religion
Introduction to our World Wide Web home base and our Newsgroup

Note: Students are urged to download a copy of Netscape to their personal computers in order to access and participate in the Greek Religion Newsgroup set up for this class. Instructions for Setting up Netscape are available on line as well as instructions for the Greek Religion Newsgroup.

Jan 10 (W) An Introduction to MacIntosh computers and Perseus.

2. Orientation to the Lands of the Aegean: Their History and Culture

Jan 12 (F) Starr, *The Ancient Greeks*, pp. 1-103 (pay particular attention to pp. 1-36 and 79-103).
Explore the Perseus Atlas. Locate Minoan cities on the map of Crete.

Jan 15-19 Kirk, *Myth*, pp. 84-118 (the nature of myths in Ancient Mesopotamia).
(M-F) Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in Lessa & Vogt, pp. 78-89

3. The Aegean in the Bronze Age: Minoan and Mycenaean Culture and Religion Reading Reviews: Demeter, Hercules

Jan 22-26 In-class study of Minoan artifacts from Palaces, Cave Sites & Tombs, and Mountain-top
(M-F) shrines
Chadwick, *The Mycenaean World*, Chapters 1, 5, and 6.
Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, pp. 19-47.

Jan 29 (M) The Frescoes from Thera; hunting rituals & male coming of age; the birth of Zeus story

Jan 31 (W) Video on Mycenae and the Bronze Age on the Mainland
Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, pp. 27-73.
Hesiod, *Theogony*, pp. 66-67 (The account of the birth of Zeus, see also the [Perseus On Line ed.](#)).

Groups Posting Class Notes:

5. Jan 22 (M): Semele
6. Jan 24 (W): Theseus
7. Jan 26 (F): Thetis
8. Jan 29 (M): Agave
9. Jan 31 (W) Gaia

4. Cosmogonic Myths Reading Reviews: Iris, Kronos

Feb 2-5 Hesiod, *Theogony* (including introduction. See also the [Perseus on Line ed.](#)).

(F-M) Leach, "Cronus and Chronos," in Lessa and Vogt, *Reader in Comparative Religion*, pp. 109-113 (third edition; pagination varies in other editions).
Enuma Elish: The Babylonian Creation Epic, in Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 60-72.

Groups Posting Class Notes:

10. Feb 2 (F): Demeter
11. Feb 5 (M): Hercules

5. Gods and Men in Homer

Reading Reviews: Lucius, Medea

Feb 7-9 Fate and Magic: Alternative Ways of Dealing with Evil.
(W-F) Homer, *The Iliad*, opening lines of each book, plus Books 1, 7, and 19.
The Bible, I Samuel 17:1-54 (the story of David and Goliath).
Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft and Magic Among the Azande*, pp. 63-83.

Groups Posting Class Notes:

12. Feb 7 (W): Iris
13. Feb 9 (F): Kronos
- Feb 12 (M) Rites of Sacrifice.

Homer, *The Iliad*, [Book 2](#) and [Book 6](#)
Hubert & Mauss, *Sacrifice*, pp. 9-49
Rice & Stambaugh, pp. 107-115

Groups Posting Class Notes:

14. Feb 12 (M): Lucius
- Feb 14 (W) Morality and Belief.

Homer, *The Iliad*, [Book 5](#), [Book 6](#), [Books 14-16](#).
Rice & Stambaugh, pp. 31-38
Guthrie, pp. 113-127.

Groups Posting Class Notes:

15. Feb 14 (W) Medea

6. The Cult of Orpheus: Ideas About Immortality and the Soul

Reading Reviews: Nereus, Rhea

Feb 16 (F) Starr, *The Ancient Greeks*, chapter six, pp. 141-151, and Part III, pp. 193-211 (for general orientation).
Guthrie, pp. 307-332.
Plato, *Republic*, 10,614-end (The Myth of Er).
The Derveni Papyrus (handout)
Orphic Inscriptions (handout)
Rice & Stambaugh, pp. 39-42, 161-164, 229-31

Groups Posting Class Notes:

16. Feb 16 (F): Nereus

Feb 19-23 Winter Recess

7. Trance and Possession in the Worship of Dionysos

Reading Reviews: Semele, Theseus

Feb 26 (M) Guthrie, pp. 145-182.

Rice & Stambaugh, pp. 195-209

Danforth, *Firewalking and Religious Healing*, Chapter 2.

Feb 28 (M) Euripides, *The Bakkhai*. See also the [Perseus On Line edition](#).

-Mar 1 (F)

Groups Posting Class Notes:

17. Feb 26 (M): Rhea

18. Feb 28 (W): Semele

19. Mar 1 (F): Theseus

8. The Other Side of Apollo: Shamans and Wonder-Workers

Reading Reviews: Thetis, Agave, Rhea

Mar 4 (M) Starr, *The Ancient Greeks*, Part II, pp. 153-190 (for general orientation).

Guthrie, pp. 73-87 and 183-204

Rice & Stambaugh, pp. 93-106

Parke, pp. 72-89

Bolton, *Aristeas of Proconnesus*.

Mar 6-8 Philostratus, *The Life of Apolonius of Tyana*.

(W-F) Levi-Strauss, "The Sorcerer and his Magic," in *Structural Anthropology*, pp. 161-180.

Groups Posting Class Notes:

20. Mar 4 (M): Thetis

21. Mar 6 (W): Agave

22. Mar 8 (F): Gaia

9. Death & the Underworld

Reading Reviews: Gaia, Demeter

Mar 11 (M) Guthrie, pp. 205-241. *The Odyssey*, Book 11 (Odysseus in the underworld) in the [Perseus On Line edition](#), or Rice & Stambaugh, pp. 221-245

Mar 13-15 Guthrie, pp. 254-277 and 294-306

(W-F) *The Iliad*, Book 23 (the funeral of Patroclus) in the [Perseus On Line edition](#)

Groups Posting Class Notes:

23. Mar 11 (M): Demeter

24. Mar 13 (W): Hercules

25. Mar 15 (F): Iris

10. The Cult of Asclepius: Dreams and Ritual Therapy in Ancient Greece

Reading Reviews: Hercules, Iris, Semele

- Mar 18 Guthrie, pp. 242-253 (*Chthonioi*).
(M) Crapanzano, "Saints, Jnun, and Dreams."
Edelstein, *Asclepius* (Testimonies).
- Mar 20-22 Rice & Stambaugh, pp. 69-80
(W-F) Levi-Strauss, "The Effectiveness of Symbols," in *Structural Anthropology*, pp. 181-201.

Groups Posting Class Notes:

26. Mar 18 (M): Kronos
27. Mar 20 (W): Lucius
28. Mar 22 (F): Medea

11. The Eleusinian Mysteries

Reading Reviews: Kronos, Lucius, Theseus

- Mar 25 Guthrie, pp. 277-294 and p. 306, number 6.
(M) Mylonas, *Eleusis*, pp. 224-243.
Rice & Stambaugh, pp. 184-193
Leach, "Time and False Noses" in Lessa and Vogt, pp. 113-116 (third edition; pagination varies editions).
- Mar 27-29 Mylonas, pp. 243-285
(W-F) "The Hymn to Demeter," in Sargent, *The Homeric Hymns*, or in Rice & Stambaugh, pp. 171-183, or in the [Perseus On Line edition](#).

Groups Posting Class Notes:

29. Mar 25 (M): Nereus
30. Mar 27 (W): Rhea
31. Mar 29 (F): Semele

12. Conversion and Salvation

Reading Reviews: Medea, Nereus, Thetis

- Apr 1-3 Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*.
(M-W)
- Apr 5 (F) Turner, "Betwixt and Between," in *The Forest of Symbols*, pp. 93-111.

Groups Posting Class Notes:

32. Apr 1 (M): Theseus
33. Apr 3 (W): Thetis
34. Apr 5 (F): Agave



Course Requirements

Minoan Religion Paper, due anytime during the week following completion of our study of

Minoan religion. A short paper (2-3 pp.) written in the form of a short encyclopedia article on the subject: "Minoan Religion." (20% of course grade)

The Cave Project, to be completed by March 31. When you look at the Perseus On Line encyclopedia, or observe what special terms in Greek literary texts have been indexed in Perseus, you will notice that caves have been missed. Yet it will be obvious to you by the second week of the semester that caves played a very important role in Greek religion.

Our class is going to carry out a coordinated class research project on the the significance of caves in ancient Minoan and Greek religion. Due date for completion of the whole project is March 29. Students will work in groups, conducting research on Perseus and in traditional sources. Each group will decide upon a group topic related to caves in Minoan and Greek religion. The papers of individuals in the group will be no more than five pages in length and will examine in depth some passage or passages from a primary source important to the group topic (e.g., Homer, Hesiod, Apollodorus) in light of the theoretical ideas and approaches discussed in class. Each group project will include a group-authored introduction, table of contents, and conclusion integrating the results of the individual papers. Further information regarding the time frame and use of the Greek Religion Newsgroup for this project will be posted in the Greek Religion Newsgroup. (40% of course grade)

Several short exercises in the use of Perseus will be announced from time to time during the semester. The first, the **Altar Project**, will begin in the Perseus Orientation Session. (20% of course grade)

Class attendance and participation in class discussion and contribution to the work of your group. Regular and valuable contribution to class discussion and group work will raise a student's grade. Poor attendance and participation will lower it.

Final Exam - Tuesday, April 9, 1:15 p.m. Half of the final exam will be an essay on religious symbolism in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (*The Golden Ass*). The topic will be circulated in advance, but the essay will be written in the exam period. Special arrangements will be made for students with learning disabilities who need extra time for exams and quizzes. (20% of course grade)

All students are responsible for reading and understanding the Bates College statements on academic honesty, crediting of sources, and plagiarism.



*Maintained by Robert W. Allison
Dept. of Philosophy & Religion and
Classical & Medieval Studies,
Bates College
Lewiston, Maine 04240*

Responses may be sent by e-mail to
rallison@abacus.bates.edu

Last Updated: January 7, 1996

