

CLAS 3700: Uncovering Greek Religion: Cults, Festivals, and Sanctuaries in the Ancient World

2023 Maymester

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DATES May 8th – June 1st, 2023

CREDITS 3 (AXLE credit for INT)

COST \$??? **

This course introduces students to the history, archaeology, art, and architecture of ancient Greece from the Bronze Age to the end of the Roman Empire by studying these subjects through the lens of ancient Greek religion. At its very heart, this course will analyze the development and diversity of the Greek religious experience: its gods, its rituals, its temples. Nevertheless, we also will evaluate the significance of Greek religion in other aspects of ancient Greek society, including social and political themes, especially as no division between church and state existed. Thus, how did Greek religious practices influence traditional divisions within Greek society, and how did they transcend or cross these boundaries? How did rituals and cults provide stability and direction to the development of the Greek city-state?

We also will study other areas of Greek culture deeply affected by religion, including the economy, the military and athletics. We will study how Greek religion both changed and held on to its past links, from the Mycenaean period through the Classical Age to the early years of Christianity, a fascinating continuity of religion for millennia. Furthermore, while the worship of the Greek pantheon was a defining factor for ‘Greek-ness’ in antiquity, the Greeks often incorporated gods from other ethnic groups into their worship. Did this inclusivity of other cultures within the Greek religious experience translate into other areas of Greek life?

Through visits to archaeological sites, we will begin our study of religion through an introduction to ancient Greek architecture, i.e. the various forms and structure of temples and sanctuaries. We also will intensively study other types of archaeological material, including pottery and sculpture, on-site and in museums to analyze the significance of visual media in Greek ritual and culture. We also will incorporate other types of source materials, including literature, epigraphy, and numismatics, to best understand religious experiences. Finally, we will study other processes, including excavation and conservation, to understand how we actively reconstruct the past through conscious and unconscious biases. We will visit many museums throughout Greece (e.g. Acropolis Museum, Archaeological Museum of Thebes) to evaluate how museums also are a tool in presenting the past.

** The quoted cost includes 24 nights of accommodation, 14 days of private bus travel (+ two airport transfers), a ferry ticket to Aegina, and entrance to c.40 archaeological sites and museums, access to the HERC study center, three credits of Vanderbilt tuition, and the Study Abroad Fee. It does not include international round-trip airfare from Nashville to Athens (c. \$1500), all lunches and all dinners except for three group meals (c. \$500 – note that Continental breakfast will be provided every morning), and minor miscellaneous expenses (laundry, mobile phone plan).

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the importance of religion and the sacred in all aspects of ancient Greek culture (political, social, economic, military, athletic)
- To provide a thorough introduction to the geography, architecture, and art of ancient Greece through the study of sanctuaries and temples
- To introduce students to various types of source materials used by scholars to understand the past (material culture, literature, inscriptions, coinage)
- To offer an opportunity for interdisciplinary research that encompasses the fields of Classics, history, art history, anthropology, and religious studies
- To evaluate how historical, religious, and ethnic boundaries set by modern societies are (or are not) valid through discussions of continuity and diversity in the ancient world
- To demonstrate how the views of the past can be influenced through biases in excavation, preservation, and presentation in museums
- To encourage students to interact and to learn about modern Greek society

CURRICULUM

- The primary mode of learning during this Maymester will occur through on-site visits, which will begin and end in Athens/Attica and will move throughout the Peloponnese and central Greece during the middle ten days. The sites visited focus primarily on sanctuaries of the Archaic and Classical periods, although sacred sites of earlier (e.g. Mycenaean) and later (e.g. Roman) periods are included. These site visits (each of which will last 2–10 hours) will intensively analyze temples and other buildings in the sanctuaries. They will include extensive lecturing by the instructor and time for individual exploration.
- The group also will visit many museums for intensive study of material culture. During these visits (and especially during the first few days of the Maymester), the students will attend basic lectures that reflect their assigned readings and incorporate fundamental information concerning various topics (e.g. topography, sculpture, religious practices, construction techniques, etc.). Such lectures will provide the necessary framework to contextualize the aforementioned site visits and valuable lessons about the construction of the past through museums.
- Students in the course also will take a more active role in their learning through their own participation in lecturing. Before the Maymester, students will choose a topic that relates to a particular site or theme and will present their research for 20–30 minutes at the site (see below in Assignments).

REQUIRED READINGS

Pausanias – Guide to Greece 1: Central Greece (ISBN 978-0140442250; available as paperback or Kindle; should be brought to Greece)

Pausanias – Guide to Greece 2: Southern Greece (ISBN 978-0140442267; available as paperback or Kindle; should be brought to Greece)

J. Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World*, Cambridge, 2005 (ISBN 978-0521006354 available in paperback; can optionally be brought to Greece)

J. Camp, *The Archaeology of Athens*, Yale, 2004 (ISBN 978-0300101515; available in paperback or online from Vanderbilt Libraries page)

Additional short readings (articles, chapters from handbooks and edited volumes) will be assigned and posted several weeks before the start of the Maymester. These resources will be uploaded to the course site, so that students can have easy access both before and during the Maymester. Students will be expected to have read general introductory works before arrival in Greece and site-specific readings before the date on which we visit the site.

ASSIGNMENTS / EVALUATION

- Participation in on-site and museum visits (30%)
Attendance and active participation are expected for lectures and site visits (i.e. all activities listed on the syllabus are mandatory). Students should have prepared all readings listed for that day (ideally before their arrival in Greece) and should be ready to engage in the discussion by taking notes and asking questions. Any unexcused absences will result in three percentage points removed from the final grade. Students are also expected to be at the first site at the time appointed by the instructor, as late arrival will affect the entire group (especially when on the road). Two tardies will equal one unexcused absence.
- Quiz at start of Maymester on basic terminology (10%)
After arrival in Athens (i.e. the fifth day of the course), students will take a quiz that encompasses basic terminology and geography. Before the beginning of the Maymester, students will receive a list (of places, personal names, religious terminology, architectural terminology, etc.) based on the course readings. These IDs will form the major part of quiz, as well as map identifications. This quiz will ensure that students have gained the knowledge of the basic history and culture of ancient Greece to fully understand site visits.
- Final exam at end of Maymester on larger themes of ancient Greek culture (20%)
Unlike the first quiz, the final exam will test both knowledge and the ability to analyze larger themes of Greek religion and society. Students will combine the information gained from their readings and gathered through visits to archaeological sites and museums. The exam will include several short IDs and two short essays.
- On-site presentation of 20–30 minutes (15%)
Well before arrival in Greece, each student will be assigned a topic to research (or they may choose their own). Topics may include a particular sanctuary, building, or theme related to ancient Greek religion. They then will present their research at the relevant site. Students should prepare the report before the Maymester begins, as there be limited time for study/work while traveling.

- Paper based on site report of 2000 words (25%)

The paper (c. six double-spaced pages = 2000 words), based on the on-site presentation, should expand on the themes discussed in the presentation and should explain the significance of the site/building/ritual to ancient Greek society. If students already are interested in a particular topic different than that which they will present on-site, they may pursue this topic with the instructor's permission. As with the presentation, the paper should be finished before arriving in Greece, although additional time occasionally will be available for work during the course. As students may wish to incorporate feedback from their presentation, students will have until the end of the Maymester period to submit the paper.