

Imagining Ancient Egypt: A History of Popular Fascination from Antiquity to the Present NELC 2101 / CLST 3710

Meeting time: MW 10:15–11:45

Location: TBD

Prerequisites: None. No prior knowledge of ancient Egypt required. Course is open to freshmen and non-majors.

Instructor: Dr. Margaret Geoga (*she/her/hers*)

Office hours: TBD and by appointment, Williams 608

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Course Description:

Thousands of years after the pyramids were built and the last hieroglyphs were written, ancient Egypt remains a source of mystery and intense interest. Why are we so fascinated with ancient Egypt, and what does that fascination reveal about us? This course explores the reception history of ancient Egypt: how people in various periods and areas of the world have thought about ancient Egypt, what it has meant to them, why they were interested in it, and how they brought the ancient Egyptian past into the present. We will focus not on ancient Egypt itself, but on the history of perceptions of, ideas about, and interactions with ancient Egyptian culture. Our investigation will include how Egyptians of later periods thought about their ancient past, as well as European and American representations (and appropriations) of ancient Egypt. A major focus of the course will be the impact of political and cultural relations between Egypt and the West on perceptions and uses of ancient Egyptian culture.

This interdisciplinary course will combine multiple areas of history—intellectual, cultural, and political—and multiple types of sources, including historical writing, literature, film, and opera. Beginning with ancient Greek and Roman visitors to Egypt, we will investigate changing modes of understanding, constructing, and representing ancient Egypt, from the medieval sultans of Egypt to Mozart to W. E. B. DuBois to protesters in Egypt's 2011 revolution.



Over the course of the semester, we will explore questions such as:

- What does it mean to think of Egypt as African vs. Middle Eastern vs. Mediterranean? Is Egypt Western, Eastern, both, or neither?
- To whom does ancient Egyptian heritage belong? How do colonialism and conceptions of race and ethnicity factor into this question?
- How do the past and the present shape each other? What is the impact of modern politics and culture on perceptions of the past? What role does the past play in the formation of modern political, social, and cultural identities?
- How can we learn about modern problems and concerns from representations of the past?

Learning Goals:

By the end of the course, students will:

- identify trends in modes of thinking about ancient Egypt and relate them to their political, cultural, and intellectual contexts;
- hone critical and analytical thinking skills by examining and synthesizing multiple types of evidence, evaluating sources' biases and credibility, and doing close readings of texts and other sources;
- hone research, writing, argumentation, and oral presentation skills through classroom discussion, written assignments, and in-class presentations.

Course Materials:

Course materials will include novels, films, musical performances, and scholarly literature. Students should expect to read 40–60 pages a week on average. There is no textbook; readings will be provided as PDFs on the course website. All readings will be in English.

Examples of primary sources include:

- *Séthos*, Jean Terrasson
- *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. DuBois
- *Akhenaten, Dweller in Truth*, Naguib Mahfouz
- *The Magic Flute*, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
- *Akhnaten*, Philip Glass
- *The Night of Counting the Years / al-Mumiya*, Shadi Abd el-Salam
- *The Mummy*, Karl Freund

Secondary sources will be drawn from books such as:

- *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, Elliott Colla
- *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West*, Erik Hornung
- *Egypt Land: Race and Nineteenth-Century American Egyptomania*, Scott Trafton
- *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium: Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings*, Okasha El Daly
- *A World Beneath the Sands: The Golden Age of Egyptology*, Toby Wilkinson

Assessment:

Research paper (6–7 pages; 10–12 pages for grad students)	25%
Annotated bibliography	10%
Paper outline (2–3 pages).....	10%
Revised paper.....	<i>Will replace original paper grade</i>
Revision statement (1 page).....	5%
Final project	25%
Project proposal (2–3 pages).....	10%
Attendance and participation	15%

Research paper: Students will write one research paper of 6–7 double-spaced pages. A list of sample topics will be provided, though you are encouraged to propose your own topic (in consultation with me). For a research paper of this length, you should consult at least five secondary sources. Papers will be graded on their argument, analysis of evidence, use of secondary sources (including proper citation), organization, clarity, and style and mechanics. A rubric with descriptions of qualities of A-, B-, C- and D-level work will be provided in class. The paper is due by 11:59 pm on **2/24**.

Annotated bibliography: As you begin to think about your research paper, you will compile an annotated bibliography of at least five secondary sources. No more than two of these may be readings assigned for class; we will discuss strategies for finding new sources in class. For each source, you will write 100–150 words describing, and evaluating, the content and argument of the sources. You may find that not all five sources included in your annotated bibliography will turn out to be useful for your paper, and that’s okay—this bibliography is a starting point, not the end of your research and thinking. The bibliography is due by 11:59 pm on **2/10**.

Paper outline: One week before your paper is due, you will submit a detailed outline of the research paper (2–3 pages). Your outline should provide a skeleton of your paper, including your main argument, supporting claims, and specific pieces of evidence. I will provide written feedback within 24–48 hours. This will provide you with the opportunity to receive feedback on your ideas and research plans before the paper is written. You are encouraged to consult with me about your paper plans before and after submitting your outlines. A sample outline illustrating the desired level of detail will be provided in class. The outline is due by 11:59 pm on **2/17**.

Paper revision: You will have the opportunity to revise your research paper after getting a grade and feedback from me. Your revised paper may be (but does not have to be) a bit longer than the original (up to 8 pages). The grade of the revised paper will replace the paper’s original grade. Please note that the revised paper will be graded with a new rubric, which will take into account the extent, thoughtfulness, and effectiveness of the revisions. A paper that is only superficially revised (for example, if typos are corrected but there are no substantial changes to the content of the paper) will receive a lower grade than the original. This policy is not intended to be punitive but rather to incentivize you to take advantage of the opportunity to grow as a writer by revising and reflecting on your writing. The revised paper is due by 11:59 pm on **3/24**.

Revision statement: Along with your revised paper, you will include a brief statement (1 page) reflecting on the revision process. This statement should describe what changes you made and

why, as well as what you have learned from writing and revising this paper that you will apply to future writing projects. The revision statement is also due by 11:59 pm on **3/24**.

Final project: Your final project will invite you to synthesize other people's receptions of ancient Egypt, as well as explore your own. It will consist of a creative component, along with a critical statement of 4–5 pages explaining and reflecting on the creative component. Options for the final project include:

- A work of art, short story, screenplay, one-act play, or other piece of writing about ancient Egypt, with an artist's statement explaining your work, ancient Egypt's role in it, and why you have made the artistic choices you have.
- A (virtual) museum exhibit of 10–15 selected pieces with labels and a curator's statement explaining the topic/theme of your exhibit, why you have chosen each piece, and how you have combined them in order to communicate some broader message or overarching narrative about your chosen topic/theme. Exhibits may include works of art depicting ancient Egypt, Egyptianizing objects and/or architecture, film/stage/opera sets. No more than five of your selected pieces can be things we have discussed in class.
- A proposal for an anthology of 10–15 written works about ancient Egypt, with a table of contents and a critical introduction of 4–5 pages discussing why you have chosen these works and how you have combined them in order to communicate some broader message or overarching narrative. No more than five of your selected works can be things we have read for class.
- Another kind of creative project proposed by the student (with approval from me) with a critical statement about the project's aims and methods.

The final project is due by 11:59 pm on **4/30**.

Project proposal: Two weeks before your final project is due, you will submit a proposal of 2–3 pages describing your plans for the creative component, what you intend to communicate with the creative component, and how you will complete the project by the due date. You are encouraged to meet with me to discuss your ideas before submitting your proposal. The proposal is due by 11:59 pm on **4/14**.

Attendance and participation: A major part of the work and learning in this class will occur during class discussions and activities, when we pick apart the assigned readings, examine them in greater depth, and make new connections between them. As a result, you are expected to be present, prepared, and engaged in class meetings, which will take place only in person (barring a major change in the university's covid policy). You will be allowed three free absences, no questions asked, with no penalty. After that, each absence without prior approval will result in a 5% deduction from your attendance and participation grade. The participation component of the grade will be determined not only by the amount a student participates in class discussions and small-group activities, but also by the quality of their contributions. High-quality contributions include comments that demonstrate preparation and reflection, comments that further the discussion by building off other students' contributions, comments that demonstrate a unique viewpoint, comments that thoughtfully challenge an established viewpoint, and questions we have not considered about our course materials. Put most simply: students who are consistently present, prepared, and engaged in class will earn a high attendance and participation grade. If a

student misses a lot of class, comes to class but does not participate in discussions, or disrupts or derails class discussions, then their attendance and participation grade will be lowered.

Assessment for graduate students: Graduate students will be assigned extra readings (largely theoretical/critical), as well as more and longer papers. The exact assessment structure can be tailored to best suit your plan of study. Possible options include a longer research paper and an extended final project; a longer research paper and an alternative final project, such as an article or a proposal for a larger-scale research project; or two longer research papers and no final project. We will meet and decide on your assessment structure in the first week of class.

Learning Environment:

The environment of this course will be collaborative. Our class meetings will include small- and large-group discussion activities, with only a small number of short lectures. Both you and I are responsible for guiding our discussions: you will come to class with your own insights and questions, and I will come to class with an agenda that leaves ample room to accommodate your input. We are all responsible for promoting a respectful and intellectually rigorous classroom environment. This means honoring each other's interests and contributions, listening and responding to each other (rather than talking at each other), and leaving space for respectful disagreement.

As the instructor, I am committed to creating an inclusive learning environment, in which students with diverse perspectives, experiences, and identities feel safe sharing their ideas. In order to help me create this environment:

- If you have a preferred name and/or set of pronouns, please let me know.
- If something is said in class (including by me) that makes you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it (or submit feedback anonymously via the course website).

Please note that, barring a major change in the university's covid policy, class meetings will take place only in person.

Course Policies:

Masks: TBD based on public health guidance.

Assignments: All assignments must be submitted to the course website by 11:59 pm on their due date. Page counts assume double spacing, a 12 pt font (Times New Roman or similar), and 1-inch margins.

Late Work: Extensions will be granted in exceptional circumstances and **with at least 24 hours' notice**. Sometimes life happens, and in those exceptional cases, I would rather you submit an assignment late after being able to put in your best effort than submit an assignment on time that is not your best work. However, without prior arrangement with me, late assignments will be penalized five points per day.

Electronic Devices: Cell phones must be silenced and put away during class time. Since class readings will be provided electronically, laptops and tablets are allowed in class for consulting readings and taking notes. You are expected to remain focused and overcome the temptation to use laptops for other purposes, including but not limited to: checking email, reading the news, using social media, texting/chatting, shopping, and watching TV. When you are off task, it is clear to both your classmates and me (even if your screen is not visible), and that distracts all of us. Students who use their devices for non-classroom purposes will lose participation points or, in the event of repeated offenses, be asked to leave the devices at home.

Academic Integrity: Intellectual development requires academic honesty. That means doing your own work and not taking words or ideas from others without proper attribution. **Without exception**, all cases of plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, will result in a zero on the assignment and be reported to the Center for Community Standards and Accountability (<https://csa.upenn.edu>), which may impose further sanctions. A second violation will result in a zero for the course and another report to the CSA. If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, feel free to ask me or consult Penn's Code of Academic Integrity (<https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>). I also highly recommend this handy infographic (<https://myerslab.uconn.edu/plagiarism-infographic/>), which includes numerous examples of what is and is not plagiarism and tips on how to avoid unintentional plagiarism.

Academic Support: Learning consultations and learning strategies workshops support students in developing more efficient and effective study skills and learning strategies. Learning specialists work with students to address time and project management, academic reading and writing, note-taking, problem-solving, exam preparation, test-taking, self-regulation, and flexibility. Students can take advantage of free on-campus tutoring for many Penn courses in both drop-in and weekly contract format. Tutoring may be individual or in small groups. Tutors will assist with applying course information, understanding key concepts, and developing course-specific strategies. Tutoring support is available throughout the term but is best accessed early in the semester. First-time users must meet with a staff member; returning users may submit their requests online.

Disability Services: The University of Pennsylvania provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who have self-identified and received approval from Disability Services. Students can contact Disability Services and make appointments to discuss and/or request accommodations by calling 215-573-9235.

Tentative Course Schedule:

Week 1 (Jan. 11–13): Introduction

Week 2 (Jan. 17–20): Classical encounters with Egypt

Week 3 (Jan. 23–27): Late antique, Islamic, and medieval Egypt

Week 4 (Jan. 30–Feb. 3): Ancient Egypt in Renaissance Europe

Week 5 (Feb. 6–10): Ottoman Egypt – *Annotated bibliography due*

Week 6 (Feb. 13–17): Egypt in the Enlightenment – *Paper outline due*

Week 7 (Feb. 20–24): Egypt and Egyptology in the 19th century – *Paper due*

Week 8 (Feb. 27–Mar. 3): Occupied Egypt

Spring break (Mar. 4–12)

Week 9 (Mar. 13–17): Ancient and modern race, ethnicity, and identity

Week 10 (Mar. 20–24): King Tut and Egyptomania – *Paper revision due*

Week 11 (Mar. 27–31): Spotlight: Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and the Amarna Period

Week 12 (Apr. 3–7): Modern Egypt I: The 20th century

Week 13 (Apr. 10–14): Modern Egypt II: The 21st century – *Final project proposal due*

Week 14 (Apr. 17–21): The modern West

Week 15 (Apr. 24–26): Wrap-up discussion – *Final project due by 11:59 pm on April 30*