

**ARTH 2269 Classical Myth and the Image 2024A M-W 3:30-5:00**

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Crosslisted as CLST 3416 . Graduate student registration: ARTH 6269/ AAMW 6269/ CLST 5416  
**No prerequisites**-- no prior knowledge of art history, archaeology, myth, literature, or Mediterranean antiquity is assumed.

**No required book purchase.**

**Readings from modern journals and books** - articles, book chapters book reviews - will be posted to Canvas as pdfs, and/or be accessible online through our Library.

**Readings of translated ancient texts (and some modern literature)** - the ones we will use are accessible freely online, and will sometimes be supplied as pdfs and Word documents posted to Canvas.

**The myths:** the library has good online reference sources for the mythology of ancient Mediterranean cultures and ways to understand it, and some source books will be on reserve. But you can find out very many things you need or wish to know here, **Theoi Greek Mythology**, <https://www.theoi.com/> - and it has an image gallery! - Graduate students (and undergrads for special projects) can consult in the encyclopedic project **Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae**, (library non-circulating reserve) for a comprehensive gazetteer of Greek and Roman images of 'Classical Myth'.

**Meet the open web!** For many ancient things and sites, online open access sources will give us good information and very good images - museum databases and online exhibitions, archaeological excavation websites, and good Wiki Creative Commons image galleries, among other resources. Essays and videos from Khan Academy/ Smart History will be a learning resource for some of our material. along with videos about ancient art from museums, on YouTube, etc.

**Official course description:**

The peoples of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds shared a vast body of stories about human and not-human beings set in a legendary deep past or supernatural present - "Classical myth." Even their neighbor cultures took up those stories (or, sometimes, gave them). The stories as spoken, read, or performed turn up in surviving ancient literature. But from the very point when Greek myth began to be written down, those stories were told with images also. Many arts of the Mediterranean world explored myth at temples and sanctuaries, in civic spaces, theaters, parks, houses and palaces, for tombs and trophies - and even on the body upon weapons, clothes and jewelry.

Love and desire and hate, hope and fear and consolation, war and peace, pleasure and excitement, power and salvation, the nature of this world and the cosmos, justice and duty and heroism, fate and free will, suffering and crime: mythological images probed the many domains

of being human in order to move the emotions and minds of people (and of gods). Our class samples this story art to ask about its makers and viewers and contexts. What, also, were relations between images and texts and language? What about religious belief vs invention, truth vs fiction?

What might it mean to look at this ancient art today, and to represent the old stories in post-ancient cultures? The class introduces ways of thinking about what images and things do; we will read in some relevant literature (drama, epic, novels, etc); and our Penn Museum will be a resource.

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**Skills to practice in this class:** close and slow looking, and close reading; the arts of skimming and looking quickly; comparing what images do to what texts and performances do (a very important skill, as so many of our images have some relationship to a work of literature in their culture of origin); using the digital domain to get and make knowledge; and finding your own voice, to make and grow ideas, in oral and written form. There is an art to describing, and every good interpretation is in the end a good description. You will learn to keep in mind actual viewers and patrons and users and inhabitants for things and places.

You will be introduced to some models and theories of analysis and interpretation from several disciplines: art history and archeology, of course, and material religion, but also other kinds of history (social, political, and literary) and anthropology.

Another skill is at thinking about the life of things in time. This can apply to antiquity itself, where objects might last long past their origin point, move around, get reused. It also involves thinking about how early modern and modern understandings, contexts, needs and biases have constructed and still construct the "Classical" and defined myth and religion. Any ancient object you meet be definition has a long life in time: as we reconstruct the ancient settings of our images and ancient experiences of them, we will also think about the modern settings of our artifact evidence: its place in an archaeological park, or its removal to a museum and its curation in a gallery, its history of collecting, and sometimes, its history of being looted - and its place, too, in the digital museum and the ecosystems of the open web.

**AI:** In this moment, AI tools are affecting how to find and make knowledge, and how to craft a range of written forms of expression. Some of what I will ask you to do is not yet done well by most chatbots, and it looks as if, for the foreseeable future, it won't be done well. (It does a really lousy job of formal analysis and logical description, when it comes to images, and cannot cope well with assessing spatial relations between images in the physical world, once you push past nice-sounding pronouncements the chatbots have gleaned from their sources.) For other tasks, some uses of AI will be permitted or even assigned. For such a task I will ask you to journal your prompts and assessment of the results. Generative AI still constantly makes up facts (hallucinates), and there is an art in learning what to ignore in what it tells you (sometimes a huge amount).

For assigned and permitted use of generative AI: I will assume only that people are using the free versions of LLM chatbots like ChatGPT 3.5, Claude2, Bing, Google Bard, etc. I can report that ChatGPT 4, 20.00/month, really is more capable for scholarly purposes than 3.5, and that it is more useful as a stand-alone program sometimes than in the way it is folded into Bing Chat. But for many people, 20.00/ month is a lot.

You can always opt out of using assigned generative AI, and I will find you an alternative task. There are many reasons to refuse to use generative AI, from a wish to keep your data private to ethical objections. One large ethical problem is the fact that the big LLMs scraped, for their datasets, a lot of copyrighted production without credit and compensation to the authors/makers.

I look forward to learning from you and with you about how to make generative AI our tool, perhaps even a partner, rather than having it simply dominate us and replace our individual voices. I am a writer and investigator also, so these issues hit close to home for me!

### **Structure and tasks:**

**We meet twice a week for 90 minutes at a time.** (Graduate students will meet me an additional hour a week.)

**Attendance** is mandatory: the lecture sessions are the heart of the course.

A long session can be a little tiring, but its virtue is that it leaves space to get some stuff out there, with me presenting as part of this, demonstrating skills and giving you some of a master narrative, as well as to query it and discuss it. That discussion can be informal, organically growing from questions and comments on your part and mine. I hope to make structured discussion happen too, with students assembled in small groups to brainstorm a bit and then share their comments with the class. Depending on class size, students may be able to do small a 5-minute individual presentation at some point.

10% **Participation**: see above - besides attendance, I will make sure guided participation draws everyone in, and students who prefer written to oral communication can write me too. Students are expected to have done the reading and 'looking' tasks for the session, and to be prepared to engage with it.

ca. 50%-60% - depends on if I set two exams or one.

**Creation**: all these projects engage you with ancient objects in some way, both as physical things, and also sometimes as objects described by ancient authors, real or invented. And at least one will engage you with the Penn Museum of Archaeology.

-- **there will be a series of small tasks or responses** throughout the semester, at least every other week. The writing you do for this will **range from a paragraph to a page**, and may include a rough sketch or diagram. These creations will be **graded as a portfolio**. The point of portfolio grading is to help you develop a skill set, without great anxiety for each task about trying something new, as it lets me credit the overall semester production and people's upwards trajectory.

-- **one-two larger takehome tasks of 2-3 pages.**

-- **a larger research project**, with a standard expository prose section of several pages (5-8), in addition to some other forms of production, to be designed on a topic of your choosing with my guidance. This project's topics can in part range past antiquity, also, up to the 21st century.

**Graduate students will make a project that is equivalent to a graduate seminar paper (20-30 pp)**

If two exams, 15% midterm and 20% final; if only one exam, a final exam for 20-25 %.

### **Testing:**

I don't like exams, but they can have a few virtues as a capstone effort. I give essay exams, not multiple-choice ones. Depending on the class size (how much grading I can cope with) I may set you regular quizzes, to take the grading weight off any larger exam. One exam might be set mid-semester; one certainly will be in finals period.

### **Reading and Looking**

Students will be asked to do two kinds of things in preparation for class:

**Read:** read closely/ skim an article or book chapter, and sometimes an assigned online text (museum web captions and essays, Khan Academy/ SmartHistory text) and a primary (ie ancient) text excerpt in translation.

**Look:** in advance of class, look at the things we will discuss, in sources besides your assigned reading. This means scholarly and museum database and Creative Commons image sets, or prequel orientation PPTs I make for you. Good photographs and drawings are everything in a course on images, and I will often send you to sources with colored images for ancient colored things, sharp large photographs you can pull for your files, multiple views of 3D things to supplement the single-photo conventional essay illustration, images of X place or things with people the shot, for scale, sometimes plans and models to orient you in space, etc.

-- Looking might also include a short video.

### **Amount/ time:**

Looking tasks per session, 10-20 minutes

Readings, per week, ca. 30-50 pages

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### **Some comments:**

**The course description tells you a lot about this class! But not everything ...**

**Where?** The art we will look at comes from around the greater Mediterranean world - Western Eurasia, Northern Africa, with perhaps an excursion into Central Asia and the migration of the more westerly stories and the images devised for them into a more eastern world. In this world, Greek and then also Roman people were often (though not always) a dominant majority. In some of our material we will indeed look at how neighbor peoples - sometimes, subject peoples to Greeks, sometimes rulers of Greeks, sometimes those who traded with them like Phoenicians - used images of myth that linked to Mediterranean traditions, even when we're not sure the patrons knew of the grand literary creations in which so much story was

embedded, from Homer's Iliad to Virgil's Aeneid. Images tied originally to Greek and then also to Roman myth crossed language barriers from Etruria to Mesopotamia.

**What kinds?** On purpose, you are going to be shown many media and kinds of art, both private and public, as the official description says. I enjoy showing you the richness of the image arts of our terrain of exploration for its own sake, naturally - they are my own scholarly focus, one of my ruling passions (and I like art from other times and places too). But crossing between private and public art - between what is on a 6th-c. BCE wine jug and on a 5th-c. temple, between what is sculpted for a 4th-c. woman's earring and what is put on display in a grand 3rd-c. Roman bath complex - has a particular point. We get to see what individuals chose to live with, for their own satisfactions (and we will consider what those could be) and also, as in the case of the mosaic images or wall-paintings in a Roman dining room, for pleasing others when hosting visitors. That tells us a lot about one set of meanings, and social identities. We also get to see what large communities looked at in the public sphere, whether an aristocrat or king or emperor gave such art, or whether whole cities funded a richly decorated temple. Some kinds of images were popular across those two worlds of domestic and public, but some were more private or more public in occurrence. It's interesting to think about why that happens, and the learned habits of comparing stories to other stories, and matching some images to texts, were mutually reinforced by domestic and public experiences.

One of those habits was that of comparing images deliberately assembled in series. If you have met Greek temple art you have seen buildings that juxtaposed different myths, and we will look at some of those: they were making an interesting spectacle for humans and for gods, and trying to tell truths about religious traditions that could matter even for people who did not believe fables were literally true. Luxury artifacts also often juxtaposed stories: like any 'Classical Myth' class this one will look sometimes at decorated Greek ceramic vessels of the 8th-4th c. BCE, and usually these juxtaposed two or more stories or scenes! Another setting for multiple images was the Roman elite house, in whose rooms and gardens images from myth came to cluster thickly, in mosaic, plaster, painting, sculpture. This art fills a lot of myth handbooks because it's there, but your readings and lectures will also introduce you to the lively investigations of relations between the images in one room and across a house and its landscape architectures.

**You are going to be imprinted, I hope, with an awareness that what things mean, and how they do that and impress or entrance a viewer, is always situated at a particular point in time, in physical space, in social space, and in relation to other images and things! I hope you will take away from this class a sense of how the world you live in, the physical one and the digital one, has been curated and arranged, and of how you might shape it yourself out of multiple images.**