

Liberal Arts 200A: “Culture and Expression: Prehistory to Late Antiquity”

Dr. Nystrom

Fall 2011

Wednesdays 6:00-8:50

1026 Mendocino

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Culture and Expression: Prehistory to Late Antiquity.” Interdisciplinary seminar on cultural movements, figures, and art forms from prehistory to late antiquity, when European culture transitioned from the classical Greco-Roman to the early medieval era. Focus on the West with some global comparison. Emphasis on theoretical perspectives, methods, and research techniques germane to the liberal arts.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Intended for students in the first year of the Liberal Arts Master’s Program, LIBA 200A is a seminar course in which weekly class sessions and writing assignments are geared to acquainting students with the cultures of the ancient Near East, Greece, and Rome. At a minimum, students who successfully complete the course will be able to describe the historical development of these civilizations; identify their major artistic, literary, philosophical, and religious movements and explain their significance; identify their major cultural achievements and explain how these evince their most essential cultural values; apply the techniques of graduate-level research in the liberal arts in leading and participating in class discussions, making oral presentations to the class, and producing high-quality written presentations of their research.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

The success of a seminar course like this one depends upon the participation of every student. You are responsible for attending all class sessions, mastering all assigned readings, making insightful and productive contributions to class discussions, and submitting assignments on time. The material we’ll be exploring in this course is exciting stuff! You’re going to learn a lot and we’ll all have a great time as long as everyone does his/her part.

TEXTS

Sayre, H., *The Humanities: Culture, Continuity and Change*, Book 1 (2nd ed., Prentice-Hall)

The Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. N.K. Sandars (Penguin)

Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. R. Fitzgerald (Doubleday)

Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Christopher Gill (Penguin)

Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*, trans. R. Fagles (Penguin)

Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. P.G. Walsh (Oxford)

Recommended: Diane Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 4th edition, or Hacker, *A Writer’s Reference*, 6th ed. (St. Martins/Bedford)

SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS (SR)

In addition to the texts listed above, there are supplementary readings (always designated as SR) posted on the LIBA 200A SacCT website.

You are responsible for bringing the appropriate supplementary readings to each of our weekly class sessions. You may bring printed hard copies to class or access them using a laptop computer. Every student should have his/her own copy of every text. Failure to bring the texts is a failure to participate fully in the class session. The same goes for using a laptop for any purpose unrelated to the course.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The “Discussion Questions” that appear below in connection with each week’s assigned readings are designed to draw your attention to important questions and issues associated with the readings. The “Discussion Questions” are a good guide to what is most important about each of the assigned readings.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Regular attendance and productive contribution to class discussions: 25 points

Five 1-2 page response papers: 25 points (5 points each)

One 15-18 page research paper/interpretive essay: 50 points

On several occasions, I will divide the class into small groups responsible for leading class discussions on specific topics the following week. This will be counted as part of your performance in “regular attendance and productive contribution to class discussions.” The same goes for your brief presentation of your research paper/interpretive essay at the end of the semester.

RESPONSE PAPERS

The five response papers are 1-2 page, double-spaced responses to assigned readings. Although the response papers are informal (*i.e.*, they can be speculative and might contain a few grammatical or spelling errors), they must be clearly written, demonstrate real familiarity with the texts, and give evidence that you have put considerable thought into them. In some (perhaps all) cases, response paper topics will be based on the “Discussion Questions” described above.

RESEARCH PAPER/INTERPRETIVE ESSAY

You may write a paper on any topic that relates directly to the course. You might want to write a research paper based on your investigation of primary and secondary sources on a topic that interests you (*e.g.*, law codes and concepts of justice in the ancient Near East, Greek sculpture, Roman satire). On the other hand, you might want to write an interpretive essay in which your focus is not so much on investigation/research as on engaging in a more penetrating analysis of

assigned course materials than we have time to do in class (*e.g.*, a comparison of the conceptions of God in Genesis and the Psalms, moral lessons in Homer's *Odyssey*, saviors and salvation in Apuleius' *Golden Ass* and Paul's *Letter to the Romans*).

The semester moves along quickly, so it's important to find a topic quickly – especially since your proposal for a topic and source materials is due at our fourth class meeting.

To get started in your thinking about possible topics, browse through this syllabus. Check out the readings, subjects, questions, and issues that will make up the stuff of our class discussions. You can also ask me for help. I will be happy to sit down and brainstorm with you. Make sure you choose a topic that really interests you. Be sure you have the linguistic and research skills required for your topic.

Papers must be 15-18 pages in length and formatted using one of the standard style sheets (*e.g.*, MLA, Chicago). Papers must be written in clear, polished English and free from errors in spelling and grammar. Your reasoning must be clear, mature, and based on solid foundations. You must make good use of both primary and secondary sources. You may use web-based sources, but these must be respectable and scholarly. When I read your paper, I'll visit the websites you've used in order to determine whether they are up-to-standard. Be sure to give proper credit to those whose work you use in your paper. I make frequent use of various search engines when I suspect plagiarism. I assign a grade of zero to any paper with even a single plagiarized clause.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 (August 31)

Introduction to course.

Week 2 (September 7): Ancient Near Eastern Culture

Response Paper #1 due.

Readings:

Sayre, chapter 2

The Code of Hammurabi (SR)

Epic of Gilgamesh

“Summary of the *Enuma Elish*” (SR)

The Gathas: The Hymns of Zarathustra (SR)

Discussion Questions:

Come to class prepared to discuss the following issues and questions. You'll find most of the material you need in the readings, but use library and web resources as well.

The Code of Hammurabi (SR)

- What is the source of Hammurabi's laws? On what is their authority based?
- How are members of various social classes treated in the Code?
- What underlying principles can you identify in the Code?
- Do the penalties assigned for crimes seem reasonable to you? Why/why not?
- The Code speaks of "justice" as the responsibility of the king. What is justice here?
- What kind of society does the Code seem to promote?

Summary of the *Enuma Elish* (SR)

- What is the structure of the world Marduk creates?
- What is the significance of the ocean?
- What is the world like? Is it a safe place? Dangerous?
- What are the gods like in this poem? What is important/unimportant to them?

Epic of Gilgamesh

- What does the poem tell us about the gods (their nature and functions)?
- Do the gods get involved in human affairs?
- What does Enkidu represent?
- How is Enkidu transformed by experience with the prostitute (Shamhat)?
- What is the world like? Is it a safe place? Dangerous?
- What does the poem say about death?
- Why is Gilgamesh considered a hero?
- Is Gilgamesh a larger-than-life figure? In what way(s)?
- What does the poem say about what we can expect from life (at the least/most)?

The Gathas/Zoroastrianism (SR)

- Who was Zoroaster (Zarathustra)?
- What is the *Avesta*?
- What are the *Gathas*?
- What is cosmic dualism? Ethical dualism?
- Who is Ahura-Mazda? Who is Angre-Mainyu (Ahriman)?
- What do the *Gathas* say about ethics?
- How does the thought of the *Gathas* compare with that of *Enuma Elish* and *Gilgamesh*?
- What kinds of religious beliefs/ideas might arise from a dualism like that found in Zoroastrianism?
- In what ways do you think Zoroastrian thought has had an influence on Western culture?
- Do we see its in contemporary culture?

Week 3 (September 14): The Culture of Ancient Israel

Readings:

Sayre, chapter 2 (review section on Israel)

Genesis 1-25

Psalms 1, 8, 19, 32, 51, 97, 119

Isaiah 1-6 and 40-55

Proverbs 1-9

“Contents of the Jewish Scriptures” (SR)

“Introduction to Readings in the Jewish Scriptures” (SR)

“The Story Told in the Jewish Scriptures/Old Testament” (SR)

You will need to find a copy of the Jewish Scriptures (= Old Testament). I suggest that you stay away from the King James translation since its language is archaic (the translation was completed in 1611). Also stay away from modern paraphrases such as the Living Bible since they sacrifice accuracy in favor of capturing the “spirit” of the text.

Discussion Questions:

Come to class prepared to discuss the following issues and questions. You’ll find most of the material you need in the readings, but use library and web resources as well.

What are the major events in the history of ancient Israel?

Genesis, chapters 1-25

How many creation stories are found in the first chapters of Genesis?

How do the creation stories compare with the *Enuma Elish*?

Do you find the “order out of chaos” theme in the biblical creation stories?

Who are Adam and Eve? Are we meant to take them figuratively? Literally?

What is “sin”? Who is the serpent? What is the expulsion from Eden about?

What is the story of Noah and the flood all about? How does it compare to the story of the flood in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*?

What is the meaning of the Tower of Babel story?

Why do you think God appears to Abraham and enters into a covenant with him?

Psalms 1, 8, 19, 32, 51, 97, 100, 119

What are the qualities of God in the Psalms?

Does God seem to be different in the Psalms than he is in Genesis?

Psalm 1

What is the source of happiness/delight for the righteous?

What is life like for the wicked?

Psalm 8

What does the psalm say about God's majesty?
What does the psalm say about human beings and their place in relation to the universe and to God?

Psalm 19

What does this psalm say about God's glory?
What does the psalm say about God's law/commandments/word?
What does the psalmist ask of God?
How does God reward those who place their trust in him?
What does the psalmist mean by the "decrees" and "commandment" of the Lord?

Psalm 32

What is it like to be forgiven by God?
What is life like for those who do not ask for forgiveness from sin?

Psalm 51

Why is the psalmist concerned about his sin?
Why does pardon/salvation bring joy?

Psalm 97

What does "the heavens proclaim his righteousness" say about nature?
How does God care for the righteous?
What is the reward of the righteous?

Psalm 119

What is the Law and why has God given the Law to Israel?
What does the gift of the Law say about the world?
What does "salvation" mean in this psalm?
Is the Law a burden or a blessing? Why?

Isaiah 1-6 and 40-55

Who were the prophets of ancient Israel?
What do the prophets have to say about history and Covenant?
Why must Isaiah warn Israel?
Who is the servant of God/servant of the Lord in chapters 40-55?
Why does Isaiah describe Israel as a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:6 and 51:4)

Proverbs 1-9

Who is “lady wisdom”?

Why does God make his “wisdom” available to humanity?

What help can God’s wisdom be to humanity?

Week 4 (September 21): Minoans, Mycenaeans, Homer, and Classical Greek Culture

Paper proposals due. Proposals should consist of a one- or two-paragraph description of your project and list of sources you plan to use.

Readings:

Sayre, chapters 4 and 5 (pp. 135-156)

Pericles’ Funeral Oration, from Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (SR)

Discussion Questions:

Come to class prepared to discuss the following issues and questions. You’ll find most of the material you need in the readings, but use library and web resources as well.

Who were the Minoans?

During what time period did Minoan culture thrive?

What do its art and architecture tell us about Minoan culture?

Who were the Mycenaeans?

Where does Homer fit within the chronology of Greek history?

Where do Homer’s heroes (Achilles, Odysseus, etc.) and the Trojan War fit within the chronology of Greek history?

What were the essential features of Mycenaean culture?

What do the words *Hellas*, Hellenism, and *polis* mean?

How did Athenian democracy develop?

How did Athenian democracy work?

What was the place of women in Athens?

What were the essential features of Spartan culture?

How did Spartan culture differ from Athenian culture?

What were the Persian Wars and how did they affect the Greeks?

What does the *Funeral Oration of Pericles* in Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* tell us about Athens?

What’s so special about Greek architecture?

What’s so special about Greek art (especially sculpture)?

What you say to a complete ignoramus who asked you to explain what’s so special about Greek culture in general (and in five minutes or less)?

Week 5 (September 28): Homer, Epic Poetry, and the *Odyssey*

Response Paper #2 due.

Readings:

Homer, *Odyssey*

Discussion Questions:

Come to class prepared to discuss the following issues and questions. You'll find most of the material you need in the readings, but use library and web resources as well.

What makes Odysseus a hero?

Is he a hero throughout the entire story?

What qualities hurt him and cause him to fail?

What qualities allow him to succeed and reach his goal?

What are the gods like in Homer's poems?

What kinds of influence do the gods have on human beings?

How do the gods compare with the God of Judaism/Christianity/Islam?

What value does the *Odyssey* place on the afterlife? Is earthly life better?

Is the *Odyssey* an expression of Greek humanism?

What lessons does the *Odyssey* teach?

How does the *Odyssey* compare with the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as an epic poem?

Week 6 (October 5): Greek Philosophy

Response Paper #3 due.

Readings:

"An Example of Socratic Dialectic," from Plato, *Republic* I (SR)

Plato, *Symposium*

"*The Allegory of the Cave*," from Plato, *Republic* VII (SR)

Discussion Questions:

Come to class prepared to discuss the following issues and questions. You'll find most of the material you need in the readings, but use library and web resources as well.

What is pre-Socratic philosophy?

Why is pre-Socratic philosophy sometimes called "Ionian philosophy"?

Who were some of the major pre-Socratic philosophers?

What issues interested them?

Who were the Sophists?

What were the most distinctive features of the thought of the Sophists?
What were the major teachings of Socrates?
What was Socratic “dialectic”?
Why did the Athenians condemn Socrates to death?
Plato is often described as an “idealist.” Why?
In what ways do Plato’s ideas represent a departure from the values of the Golden Age of the fifth century BCE?
What is the “The Allegory of the Cave” all about?
Why does Plato think philosophers should be kings/rulers?
What is Plato’s “Theory of Forms”? (= “Theory of Ideas”)
You should be able to describe the speeches of each of the participants in the *Symposium*.
How do we see the Theory of Forms and Plato’s idealism illustrated in the *Symposium*?
What are the essential features of the philosophy of Aristotle?

Week 7 (October 12): Greek Tragedy

Response Paper #4 due.

Readings:

Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*

Discussion Questions:

Come to class prepared to discuss the following issues and questions. You’ll find most of the material you need in the readings, but use library and web resources as well.

Antigone

Why does Antigone bury her brother?
Is Creon right or wrong in issuing his decree?
Is *Antigone* a play about a conflict between absolute right and absolute wrong?
How would ancient Greeks have defended or criticized Creon’s actions?
How would ancient Greeks have defended or criticized Antigone?
Why does Antigone think it is important to defend the laws of the gods?
What *are* these laws, anyway?
The famous “Ode to Man” in the second stasimon of *Antigone* is often described as an eloquent expression of Greek humanism. Is it?

Oedipus the King

Why does it take Oedipus so long to realize the truth about himself?
“Self-knowledge” is one of the great themes in this play. Why does Oedipus find it hard to know himself?
What are Oedipus’ faults?

Do you have any of these faults? You probably don't, but maybe people you know do.
What is fate (for Sophocles)?
What role does fate have in this play?
What is Sophocles trying to teach in this play?

Week 8 (October 19): Hellenistic Culture

Paper outlines due. Outlines should be 2-3 pages in length, describe major points you plan to make in your paper, and include your bibliography.

Readings:

Sayre, chapter 5 (pp. 156-73)
Plutarch, *On the Fortune of Alexander* 1.5-8 (SR)

Discussion Questions:

Come to class prepared to discuss the following issues and questions. You'll find much of the material you need in the readings, but use library and web resources as well.

Plutarch, *On the Fortune of Alexander*

- What does Plutarch mean by the "fortune" of Alexander?
- Why does Plutarch think that Alexander was a philosopher?
- Why does Plutarch think that Alexander was a greater philosopher than all others?
- Why does Plutarch think that Alexander was a greater conqueror than all other conquerors?

Be able to describe the essential features of political and social organization in the Hellenistic Age (major Hellenistic kingdoms, the role of the polis in Hellenistic civilization, social classes, influence of Greeks in the eastern Mediterranean region, etc.).

Be able to describe the essential features of Hellenistic art and architecture (major trends, ideals, achievements, etc.).

Be able to describe the essential features of Hellenistic religion (religious syncretism, role of the traditional cults of Greek gods, increasing importance of gods of Egypt and other regions, mystery religions/mystery cults, etc.).

Be able to describe the essential features of Hellenistic literature (types/genres, trends, ideals, major writers, etc.)

How did Hellenistic political and social organization, art and architecture, religion, and literature differ from those of the classical period?

Week 9 (October 26): Roman history and government, drama, poetry

Readings:

Sayre, chapter 6

“The Roman Constitution,” from Polybius, *Universal History* 6 (SR)

“The Story of Cincinnatus,” from Livy, *History* 3 (SR)

“Augustan Autocracy,” from Tacitus, *Annals* 1.2-4 (SR)

Discussion Questions:

Come to class prepared to discuss the following issues and questions. You’ll find much of the material you need in the readings, but use library and web resources as well.

Polybius, *Universal History* 6 (SR)

What are the major branches of Roman government and their respective responsibilities?
Does Polybius like the Roman constitution? (explain “constitution” in Roman civilization)?

Livy, *History* 3 (SR)

What does Livy admire about Cincinnatus?
Why would someone living in Livy’s time (early first century CE) want to extol the virtues of someone like Cincinnatus?

Tacitus, *Annals* 1.2-4 (Augustan Autocracy)

What does Tacitus think of Augustus?
How was Augustus able to win over different groups within the Roman world (soldiers, the people of the city of Rome, provincials, aristocrats)?
Did Augustus practice nepotism? Was this practice possible under the Republic?
How did the government of Augustus compare with government under the Republic (as described by Polybius in his *Universal History*)?
How does Augustus compare with Cincinnatus (as far as desire for power goes, and dedication to the values of the Republic)?
Why does Tacitus see a connection between the “revolution” under Augustus and morality?
Do you think Tacitus might have been (like Livy) an admirer of Cincinnatus?

Using library and web resources, research the lives and work of the poets Catullus, Martial, and Juvenal. Come to class prepared to give a brief biographical sketch of each and to share with the class four or five (more, if you would like) of the poems of Catullus and Martial and one of the poems of Juvenal.

Week 10 (November 2): Roman Philosophy

Readings:

Sayre, chapter 6

“Plotinus,” from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SR)

“Porphyry on the Life of Plotinus,” from Plotinus, *Enneads* (SR)

Discussion Questions:

Come to class prepared to discuss the following issues and questions. You’ll find much of the material you need in the readings, but use library and web resources as well.

Do some research on Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. These three were major Stoic philosophers. Come to class prepared to describe the life and thought of each.

Stanford Encyclopedia article on “Plotinus”

What did Plotinus teach about ultimate reality, the origin of the world we live in, and the destiny of the world?

What, exactly, does Plotinus mean by “One,” “Mind,” and “Soul”?

“Porphyry on the Life of Plotinus,” from Plotinus, *Enneads*

Why was Plotinus reluctant to tell others about his life or to allow images to be made of himself?

Why do you think Plotinus was considered to be a “holy man” as well as a philosopher?

What do you think he was

Week 11 (November 9): Roman religion, the Roman novel, Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*

Response Paper #5 due.

Readings:

Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*

Discussion Questions:

Come to class prepared to discuss the following issues and questions. You’ll find much of the material you need in the readings, but use library and web resources as well.

What were the essential features of Roman religion?

Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*

- There is a lot of magic in this story. Is it a story about magic?
- What is the story about?
- What does the story say about the nature of human existence?
- What purpose does the story of Cupid and Psyche serve in the story?
- What does the story say about fate?
- What does the story say about salvation?
- What is the role of Isis in this story? Who is she, really?

Week 12 (November 16): Early Christianity, Christianity in the Roman World

Readings:

Gospel of John

Paul's *Letter to the Romans*

Nystrom, "A Brief Introduction to the Early History of Christianity" (SR)

Discussion Questions:

Come to class prepared to discuss the following issues and questions. You'll find much of the material you need in the readings, but use library and web resources as well.

Gospel of John

- What is the primary message of the Gospel of John?
- Who, exactly, is Jesus in the Gospel of John?
- What is the "Word" mentioned in the prologue of the Gospel (the first 18 verses)?

Paul's *Letter to the Romans*

- What is the essence of Paul's argument in his *Letter to the Romans*?
- The human predicament (of both Jews and Gentiles)
- Sin. What is it?
- What does Paul say about human nature and the effects of sin on it?
- Faith. What is it?
- How does faith (and in what?) bring deliverance from sin and death?
- What does Paul mean when he talks about dying and rising with Christ?
- What does Paul mean when he talks about "life in Christ" and "life in the Spirit"?

"Brief Introduction to the Early History of Christianity"

- What were the essential teachings of Jesus?
- What is the significance of Paul of Tarsus?
- What is the New Testament and how was it put together?

How did Christians fare within the Roman world?
Why did many people find Christianity attractive?
What were some of the early forms of heterodox Christianity?
How did Christianity attempt to define itself in late antiquity?
Who were the apologists?
What were the essential features of the thought of St. Augustine?

WEEK 13 (November 23): Clinic on Research Papers/Interpretive Essays

There will be no formal class session this week. I will be available to discuss papers with individual students but attendance is not required.

Weeks 14 (November 30) and 15 (December 7): Student Presentations

Brief (20-30 minute) presentations on research papers/interpretive essays.