

Fall 2020

GESM 100: CLASSICS OF GREEK LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY.

Professor Kevin Robb

First Class (Mon. Aug. 17): Orientation session. Informal discussion of the subject matter of the course and the formal requirements.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THIS COURSE

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- Critically analyze classic literary and philosophical texts from Ancient Greece
- Understand the origins and development of Ancient Greek culture
- Research and write a college-level paper on a pre-approved topic relevant to this course

FOCUS OF THIS COURSE

The focus of the course will be on the literary and philosophical achievement of the ancient Greeks from the beginning of Greek literature down to the fourth-century philosophers, notably Socrates and Plato. The main emphasis will be on Homer's Odyssey and Plato's Euthyphro and Republic, but the course may also investigate other important readings (e.g., Plato's Apology) as time and student interest indicates.

An underlying theme of the course is the gradual development in Greek culture from its origins in total orality (before 750 BC) to the flourishing alphabetic literacy of the fourth century. This development affected Greek culture profoundly, from obvious ways such as the gradual rise of written law, to the emergence of rational ethics and the decline of the moral and religious authority of epic poets. We shall look at many aspects of this cultural development, but the emphasis will be on the origins of Greek (i.e., Western) literature, philosophy and science.

Brief discussion of the traditional divisions of ancient literature and art and some major figures in each period. In the nineteenth century and before, these periods were (1) Archaic, (2) High Classical and Classical, (3) Hellenistic, (4) Patristic. This covered roughly the period from 700 BC to 500 AD.

Starting in the late 19th century, due to discoveries mainly in archeology that began with Schliemann in 1870, historians were able to add the earlier periods of Bronze Age and Dark Age Greece, or roughly, the periods of Minoan and Mycenaean Civilization, followed by Dark Age (Geometric and Sub-Geometric) Greece. This covers roughly the period from 2000 BC to 700 BC. Since the early 1950s we have known that the Mycenaean spoke an early form of Greek, which came as a shock to historians.

Discussion of formal requirements:

- 1 pass/fail quiz
- 1 hour exam (open book)

- 2 research papers
 - Each research paper approximately 7-12 pages
 - Topics will be drawn from the subject matter in consultation with professor.

Regular class attendance. Incompletes. Office hours by appointment.

The divisions that follow are approximations only. The material will be covered in the order indicated, but the divisions into weeks depend on class discussion that may lead to digressions. As a result, these divisions are intentionally flexible.

Week I (week of AUG. 17). Recovering Bronze Age Greece.

Archeology and the recovery of Mycenaean and Minoan culture on Greek soil. Linear A and B. Decipherment of Linear B. The contributions of Heinrich Schliemann, Arthur Evans, Michael Ventris, et. al. General discussion of the oldest Greek literature, Homer and Hesiod. The introduction of alphabetic literacy into Greece. The problem of the relation of the earliest literary texts (Iliad and Odyssey) to an historical Mycenaean Greece that they purport to represent.

Reading for Weeks 1-2: Havelock, Preface to Plato, Chapter 7. (E-book has been uploaded to our course Google folder.)

Suggested: Robb, Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece, Chapter One. Chapter has been uploaded to our course Google folder; read pp. 21-27.

Week 2-3. Finish the subject matter of Week I. Among topics that may be added are aspects of the material culture of Dark Age Greece and the first inscriptions on artifacts at the end of this period (Athens, Ithaca, Aegina, Thebes). The oral transmission of "Homer" in this period as reflected in the oldest Greek inscriptions, and the text of Homer.

Understanding the offence to the House of Odysseus on Ithaca.

Reading: Odyssey Books 1 and 2.

There will be a pass/fail quiz on the historical background material when that material is completed.

Weeks 3-5/6. The oral institutions of the symposium and especially xenia ("guest-friendship"); Telemachus' appeal to the agora of Ithaca. The ethics of established proprieties in a society before written law. The vocabulary of early Greek values; the language of approval and condemnation. The Shield Scene in the Iliad: resolving disputes before written law. Morality and the Greek gods. The early Greek concept of soul, and of life after death.

Readings: Odyssey, Books 3-9, and selections from later books as class discussion may indicate Suggested: Havelock, Preface to Plato, Chapters 4, 5, 8.

Note: There will be a full period open book exam when the Odyssey material is completed. Subject matter: Class discussion material and the readings in Homer.

As noted, syllabus dates are flexible and will depend on the progress of class discussion, but all assignments and exam dates will be announced well in advance in class (students who participate regularly will have no problem).

Week 7. Finish discussion of the Odyssey, if necessary, and begin Socrates. If time permits: Hesiod of Ascrea (Theogony), and the family of the gods. Readings will be announced in class.

Week 7-10. Socrates and The Socratic Problem, the Socratic literature, legal issues in the trial of Socrates, the debate between Socrates and Euthyphro on piety, implications of the famous "Euthyphro Question." Socrates and the challenge of Thrasymachus in Republic I. Is successful self-aggrandizement the most rational goal of life? The further challenges of Glaucon and Adeimantus. A contractual theory of justice and society? What went wrong with the traditional Greek paideia?

Readings: The Euthyphro of Plato; (Apology and Crito are recommended, and may be required). Begin the Republic, Book I.

Weeks 11 - end of semester. The argument of Plato's Republic as time permits, emphasis on Books II – VI.

Some possible topics: Building Utopia, the Ideal State or the "New Athens." Selecting natural leaders/rulers. Educating the future rulers. Reforming the concept of a god. Homeric heroes as models of behavior? The importance and dangers of mimêsis. Expulsion of the poets. Rulers and the ruled; the place of women in the New Athens; the equality of women in education and political life; a philosopher-queen? The emergence of philosopher-kings (or queens) and the abolition of the traditional family. Plato: Totalitarian or Democrat? Definition of the philosopher. Knowledge and Opinion. The Theory of Forms. Divided Line and Cave.

Readings: Sections of Republic, Books II - VI.

Note: The material covered in class in the final weeks is flexible and will depend on the progress of the class in previous weeks, including class discussions and evolving interests.

FINAL EXAM SCHEDULE

- **Classes End: Fri., Nov. 13**
- **Study Days: Sat.-Mon., Nov. 14-16**
- **Final Exam Date: Friday, Nov. 20, 11:00-1:00**
 - **New Zoom link for the final exam will be provided**

NOTE: A reminder for the final exam date and time will also be announced in class.

BOOKS

Homer, Odyssey (tr. Lattimore).

Plato, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, all found in David Gallop, ed., Plato: The Defense of Socrates, Euthyphro, Crito.

Plato: Republic (tr. Grube; revised by Reeve).

See Book List in Schedule of Classes: <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20203/classes/gesm/>

FINAL GRADES

The final grade for the course will average the grades for the written exercises: one open book exam and two research papers. Consideration in the form of extra credit may be given for outstanding improvement, or for class participation and discussion.