

HSS 404.045 FALL 2025

LIT SEM

HOW LEGENDS BECOME MYTHS: A JOURNEY THROUGH CLASSIC GREEK LITERATURE

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T TH 8:30 - 9:50
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OFFICE HOURS Fall 2025

Mon 11:35- 12:30 Tues 11:35-12:35 Wed 11:35 – 12:35 Th 11:35-12:35
and by appointment; contact me face to face or by email to set up an appointment.

HSS 404 Prerequisites: ENGL 102 with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits at the 300-level may be taken concurrently as a co-requisite. Registration requires senior standing.

Book List Below basic schedule.

HSS 404.045 Scope How legends become myths: a journey through classic Greek literature, is a foray into Classic Greek literature of the Classic period, roughly 750 BCE to 300 BCE. We'll read and discuss the Greek literature of the period, and how the heroes went from doers of big deeds to mythic status so that even today their names are still known and their deeds mined by modern day creators. We'll start from the creation myths to the age of heroes, then the Iliad and Odyssey, some Greek poets, the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides, and some plays. We'll also touch on some of the works of the philosophers that have stood the test of time and still have relevance for us today. We'll also try to get your views in too, so be prepared to speak your view of some of the people we come across, since a course like this opens minds into a world partly familiar to us but in many ways quite different.

Along the way, we will need some historical context, so there will have to be some background into the Greek geographical world of the day, then relying chiefly on Plutarch for biographies of the famous ones both legend and historical, and the history of the period including contrasting Sparta and Athens, the Persian Wars, the Peloponnesian War, and the status of women.

Learning and outcomes

From the readings and by doing some research, you will know many of the famous names of legend, and get the references to and have the original story about the selected Greek authors and their major works. From discussions, you will see the Greek notions about human character, and apply the Greek thought where relevant to our situations today.

You should be able to understand the background to why and how the Greeks developed their unique culture and worldview, and be able to apply the major insights to present day situations.

Course Requirements

Keeping up with the readings Participating in discussions, including online.
Two short essays One research paper, at least 9 pages
One presentation on your research project, 7-10 minutes
There will be periodic quizzes, a midterm and a final exam on the last day of classes

Attendance Policy Students are allowed 4 unexcused absences. Excused absences follow the standard Humanities policy for religious observances, illness and so on. Excessive absences and latenesses will affect your grade.

Schedule

For now, this is the basic schedule. There will be modifications, and more details as we get closer to the date.

Week

1. Background: the Mediterranean world. Greek myths
2. Hesiod *Theogony*, *Works and Days*. Theogony is the oldest creation story of the Greeks, written about the time of Homer and the epics.
Begin: The epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey
3. The epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey
4. The civic literature of Solon, Lycurgus, Hesiod. Some poetry: Sappho, Archilochus
5. Herodotus, the travelogue and the Persian Wars
6. Thucydides, including Pericles Funeral Oration, excerpts from The Peloponnesian War
7. Greek plays: Sophocles, Aeschylus
8. Midterm Euripides
9. Aristophanes
10. The philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others
11. After the Greek Golden Age
12. Greek stories influence over the centuries
13. Presentations
14. Presentations

Required books: Classical Myth, 9th edition, by Barry Powell ISBN: 9780197527986

You can get the e-book, or print edition, new or used. You can use this as a reference book for all the names we'll encounter throughout the course in the mythology and drama part of the course.

Don't be deterred by the length of the list below. Much is available online, and as long as you have read enough to take part in a discussion, the format is less important. Thucydides is interesting for historians and social psychologists for how stress brings out the less good qualities in humans, and explains why later Greek and Roman philosophers were concerned with imparting good moral standards to young people.

Other books you can purchase or find online.

© Hesiod, *Theogony* and *Works and Days* translation by Apostolos Athanassakis These give the origins of the gods and some legends. Most that we'll go over is on PDFs that will be posted.

- ⊙ The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. I use the Robert Fagles translations, but you can look at other translations; the comparisons are interesting. Most that we'll go over is on PDFs that will be posted.
- ⊙ Barbara Fowles *Archaic Poetry* We'll use some PDF pages.
- ⊙ Herodotus, *The Histories*. There are several well done translations; I use a Penguin one, and there is one by Tom Holland which is a bit livelier.
- ⊙ Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War* I use the Penguin Rex Warner translation
- ⊙ **However, there is one large book *The Greek Histories* edited by Mary Lefkowitz and James Ronn, with the big three of the Greek historians. We'll use selections from this book because it is convenient, but all is online.**
- ⊙ Greek dramas. The short list is *Medea, Lysistrata, Oedipus, Antigone, the Oresteia*. We can't do all but we'll do what we can. You can find any number of translations in print and online. Most of what we'll do is on PDFs.
- ⊙ **There is one large book *The Greek Plays*, also edited by Mary Lefkowitz and James Ronn, with the big plays of the Greek dramatists. We'll use selections from this book because it is convenient, but all is online, or there are numerous translations in bookstores. I will give the translations I use.**