

History 110: The Ancient Mediterranean



Fall 2006: M, W, F - 9.55-10.45; 1121 Humanities

Instructor: M. Kleijwegt (mkleijwegt@wisc.edu)

Office: 5219 Humanities; Office Hours: Monday: 11:00-12:00; Friday: 11:00-12:00

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will introduce students to the history and culture of the Ancient Mediterranean, and will cover the period from the earliest civilizations to the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West. We will trace the development of communities and cultures; social relations and economic conditions; political, religious and intellectual institutions and thought. The term Ancient Mediterranean refers to all civilizations originating in the area of the Mediterranean Sea, including the early Mesopotamian civilizations.

REQUIRED TEXT

Robin W. Winks/Susan P. Mattern-Parkes, *The Ancient Mediterranean World: From the Stone Age to A.D. 600*, New York and London: Oxford University Press 2004.

WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly reading assignments are compulsory and should be completed *prior* to the subject being covered in class. In order to gain the greatest benefit from each weekly set of three lectures, students should complete required reading before the Monday lecture, and thus be equipped better to comprehend the subject matter of each of the three lectures.

DISCUSSION SECTIONS

For the discussion sections students will receive texts (in translation) which illustrate events or concepts discussed in the course. **NB. The final exam will include some of the same textual material, on which you are asked to answer questions. Therefore, make sure that you do not lose these texts, pay attention and make notes.**

THREE CREDITS OR FOUR CREDITS

If you are signed up for FOUR credits, you need to write a five page-essay which needs to be submitted BEFORE DECEMBER 1. Hand in your essay to your TA. You can choose to write on the following topics:

Kingship in Egypt, Israel and Mesopotamia.
Pericles and the Radicalization of Democracy.
Homer and the Fabrication of Troy.
The Olympic Games.
Religion in Athens.
Romulus and the Foundation of Rome.
Democracy in Rome?
The Struggle of the Orders.
The Badness of Caligula.
Constantine's Conversion: sham performance or genuine belief?

ASSESSMENT, GRADING AND EXAMINATIONS

The course will be examined through two midterm exams and one final examination. The first midterm exam will take place on Friday October 20th (week 7) and the second on Friday November 22nd (week 12). Together they will count for 40% of the final grade (i.e. 20% plus 20%). The final examination will take place on December 21 and will count for 50% of the final grade. The remaining 10% can be earned by attendance (5%) and by displaying meaningful contributions to the discussion in section (5%).

If you have signed up for FOUR credits, the grade for your essay will be worked into the comparison at the rate of 5%.

TYPE OF QUESTIONS

Midterms and Final Exam will have a combination of different types of questions. There will be three types of questions: multiple choice questions, text-based questions, and essay-type questions. The texts will be selected from the texts discussed during the discussion sections. In the essay-type questions you will be asked to construct an argument in 500 words or less. The limit on the number of words is there for a reason. It is NOT the purpose that you write as much as you can in the slim hope that somewhere in there you have given me the information that really counts as THE CORRECT ANSWER. The CORRECT ANSWER is determined by how well you can argue your point.

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT DATES:

FIRST MIDTERM EXAM: FRIDAY 20 OCTOBER

SECOND MIDTERM EXAM: WEDNESDAY 22 NOVEMBER

FINAL EXAM: THURSDAY 21 DECEMBER

TEACHING PROGRAM

Week 1: W 9/6; F 9/8: Introduction to the Ancient Mediterranean World.

Week 2: M 9/11; W 9/13; F 9/15: Early Man and Mesopotamia.

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 1-26.

Week 3: M 9/18; W 9/20; F 9/22: Israel and Egypt.

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 26-54.

Week 4: M 9/25; W 9/27; F 9/29: Greece: The Dark Age and the Archaic Age.

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 54-74.

Week 5: M 10/2; W 10/4; F 10/6: The Classical Age of Greece.

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 74-87.

Week 6: M 10/9; W 10/11; F 10/13: The Classical Age of Greece.

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 87-101.

Week 7: M 10/16; W 10/18; F 10/20: Fourth Century BC Greece and the Rise of Macedon.

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 101-117.

First Midterm Exam on Friday 20 October.

Week 8: M 10/23; W 10/25; F 10/27: Early Rome

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 118-133.

Week 9: M 10/30; W 11/1; F 11/3: Conquest and Imperialism.

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 118-133.

Week 10: M 11/6; W 11/8; F 11/10: The Age of Crisis: 133-31 BC.

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 133-145.

Week 11: M 11/13; W 11/15; F 11/17: The Principate.

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 145-165.

Week 12: M 11/20; W 11/22: The Second and Third Century AD

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 165-183.

Second Midterm Exam on Wednesday 22 November.

Week 13: M 11/27; W 11/29; 12/1: Christianity and Empire.

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 183-208.

Week 14: M 12/4; W 12/6; F 12/8: The World of Late Antiquity.

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 183-208.

Week 15: M 12/11; W 12/13; F 12/15: The Collapse of the Roman Empire: What Comes Next?

Readings: The Ancient Mediterranean World, pp. 208-217.

The Outlines of Ancient History
An Introduction to History 110: The Ancient Mediterranean

This document briefly outlines a number of important issues that are necessary for a successful performance in this course. Read it carefully at least a couple of times during the semester.



Reconstructing Caesar's Assassination

Dates are only the first step in coming to terms with Ancient History. They are essential for pinpointing a development, but in the final analysis they are utterly useless as facts without any basic understanding of their significance. Let me illustrate this with an example that we are all familiar with, especially, but not necessarily only, through the medium of HBO. It is the most famous and arguably also the most important date in Ancient History.



Most people will know two things about Caesar's assassination. The first thing is something that everybody knows, even the calendrically challenged: Julius Caesar was assassinated on the Ides of March, which is March 15. The other thing that is known to many people, mainly through Shakespeare and Asterix rather than through any of the ancient sources, is that with his dying breath Caesar is supposed to have said "You, too, Brutus?" Brutus was a protégé of Caesar's and it was rumored that Brutus' mother, Servilia, and Caesar had had a relationship once, and that Brutus may have been Caesar's son (Caesar had one daughter who died in childbirth when she was married to Pompey, Caesar's greatest rival). Caesar never said "You, too, Brutus?" He said "You too, my son?"; but he said it in Greek. The fact that he used Greek rather than his native Latin for his dying words is nothing short of astounding, but it becomes easily understandable when we realize that Greek was for Roman senators the same as French was for kings in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth century (even the English king spoke French); it was the language of culture and sophistication. It must either be assumed that Caesar instinctively switched to his more sophisticated mode to accuse Brutus, or, even more intriguingly, he was aware of the momentous occasion and knew that a statement in Greek made by a Roman would make an even bigger impression on posterity.

Which of the two is the correct interpretation is a matter of debate. The testing lies in whether you can make it ACCEPTABLE to the scholarly community. If your argument in favor or against a certain theory is not believed, the scholarly community will simply ignore it and move on to reach a more acceptable idea. Debate is virtually never-ending. Accepted truths are in due course removed from the equation after scholars express their dissatisfaction with their meaning and impact. This is a natural development. Every generation of scholars creates the past that agrees best with the ideas put forward by that

community. Ideas can change radically over time. Example: in seventeenth century England the poet Vergil was not popular because he was considered to have been a collaborator with an oppressive regime, that of the emperor Augustus. Instead of being an independent poet, he worshipped and glorified the first emperor. In the twenty-first century Vergil is revered for writing high-quality poetry and for problematizing the position of the emperor (he does not criticize the emperor directly, but his poetry allows the reader to reach a negative conclusion about Augustus). He is not a 100% collaborator; he is a critical thinker as well.

The date of Julius Caesar's assassination has become part of our system of general knowledge. Beware of the Ides of March is a well-known expression (this statement has not been jaywalked and therefore cannot be guaranteed). But: what actually happened on that day? Let us briefly reconstruct the facts as they survive in ancient accounts. Let us see how much we really know about this momentous day in Roman history. First of all, no eye-witness account for what happened on this day survives. There may have been snippets of eye-witness information that survive in historical accounts, but the latter have become much embellished over time. The story of Caesar's assassination has become part of the collective memory of the Roman people and we see clear traces of propaganda and rewriting to create the maximum of dramatic effect. After careful consideration of all the evidence it must be concluded that there is hardly anything about Caesar's assassination that we know for a fact. Examples:

1. We know that Caesar was murdered at the foot of Pompey's statue. This creates suspicions about the reliability of this item, for it would be ironic if Caesar's murder had actually taken place in the presence, so to speak, of his one-time rival (Pompey had lost the civil war against Caesar and while on the run he was beheaded in Egypt by courtiers of Cleopatra, the Cleopatra). Accepting this item as fact depends on the amount of faith we put in individual sources. The detail about the location of the murder is reported in a letter by Cicero, who was alive at the time and may or may not have been present when Caesar was murdered. The item returns in other accounts, written independently from Cicero's correspondence.

2. The number of wounds that Caesar suffered is reported differently by our sources, ranging from 23 to 37. The exact number of wounds may not be relevant, but it shows the absence of hardcore facts as a problem that we have to face. Valerius Maximus, who lived fifty years after Caesar's death, reports with clear admiration that, even though suffering from 23 different wounds, Caesar used both hands to ensure that his toga fell decently over his lower body. This is commonly seen as an element that was added later in order to embellish the story of Caesar's murder with a moral dimension, signaling how Caesar was as a person (Note that it is the details which are revealed at crucial moments in history that encourage us to characterize an individual; the Romans had developed an entire literature of 'famous last moments' and 'famous last sayings' to measure individual greatness; not showing your underpants when you are about to die certainly counts as greatness).

3. The number of assassins differs from one account to the next. We only know the names of about ten of them, while we know that many more were involved. One of the most intriguing stories in this respect features Minucius Basilus, otherwise unknown, who is reported to have stabbed one of the other conspirators rather than wounded Caesar. This story is found in the fragmentary historical account of the life of Julius Caesar by Nicolaus of Damascus. He also wrote an official biography of Caesar's great-nephew Octavian who ruled the Roman world as the first emperor Augustus, lived in Rome and had access to official documents. It is uncertain whether this detail is reliable. It depends on how well you can argue the point that this item is not only believable but also historically accurate. It fits the atmosphere of a chaotic situation in which many leading senators come rushing forward to deal Caesar the final blow.

If these facts already raise so many problems, how can we ever hope to be successful in reconstructing all the facts of Caesar's assassination? In addition to hard facts, such as dates and details, history also is concerned with motives, causes, motivations, drives, ambitions, thoughts etc. Interpreting what makes people do certain things is always a subjective exercise. Even a personal statement from the person who committed the act needs to be viewed with suspicion. Example:

Just after Caesar's murder the main assassins Brutus and Cassius had to flee to Greece where they built up an army to withstand an invasion from Romans loyal to Caesar's memory, including Asinius Pollio, Aemilius Lepidus, Mark Antony and Caesar's heir, Octavian, now officially known as Caius Julius Caesar, after his posthumous adoption by Caesar. While in Greece the mint of Brutus and Cassius issued a coin with the following image:



The coin shows Brutus on the one side with the title imperator, victorious general. On the other side the text EID MAR (the ides of March), two daggers and a conically shaped

object. The latter represents a felt cap, more specifically the cap worn by freed slaves. Here it stands for the freedom established by the murder of Caesar. How can we use this coin as evidence? It is a piece of evidence, and we have to treat it as if it was a text.

It is tempting to assume that the coin's image was designed to persuade people unsure of the impact of Caesar's death that the murder had been a good thing. It is doubtful whether the coin achieved this purpose. It was minted in Greece and Asia and was used to pay the soldiers of Brutus and Cassius. It may safely be assumed that they needed no special prompting to believe that Caesar's murder had been a positive thing. This is still propaganda, but it is not likely that it changed the political views of those who had the coins in their pockets. The key question is whether these coins were also circulating in parts of the Roman Empire where Brutus and Cassius had no political influence. In other words, we need to test an assumption from all angles to see whether it can convince us.

After having discussed the event of the assassination itself and its impact on the popular imagination, we need to focus on what is arguably the most important aspect of Caesar's assassination: **WHY** was he killed? Note that the murder was not an act committed by a single deranged individual, but the outcome of a plan carefully hatched by more than thirty members of the senate, the official ruling body of Rome (you are free to draw parallels with contemporary politics and assassinations of and assassination attempts on US presidents). The following developments should be taken into consideration:

STEP 1: The Romans had expelled their last king in 509 BC and had replaced his rule with a Republican system of government. In this system the most important restrictions were parity (an equal number of officials to share executive power) and limits to the period during which executive power could be held (normally 1 year). All executives belonged to the political elite, but they were elected by the people. Since that day in history, kings and sole rulers had a bad reputation in Roman thought and ideology.

STEP 2: From the beginning of the second century BC we notice increasing competition and rivalry within the ranks of the political elite. This leads to the rise of extremely powerful politicians who come to be more interested in the expansion of their own political power, glory and reputation rather than in serving the common good (whatever that may be). Caesar is one of them. After having cooperated with a number of his rivals against the combined interests of the senate, including Crassus and Pompey, in 49 BC civil war is unavoidable. After having defeated Pompey in Greece, Caesar becomes sole ruler of Rome. In 48 BC Caesar becomes dictator (sole ruler with virtually unlimited political powers) for a period of ten years; in February 44 BC he is made dictator for life. The office of the dictator was instituted to handle crises and emergency situations. According to the constitution of the Roman Republic, he was supposed to step down after the crisis had been solved or after a maximum of eighteen months in office. Even though Caesar's appointments as dictator were undertaken by the senate and thus legitimate, his disregard for the constitutional limitations of the office was not.

NOTE: We have no certainty as to what Caesar's political objectives were in the months prior to his death, let alone his long-term goals. We need to collect all the evidence, weigh it, remove what is false and incorrect, and then reconstruct events and developments as much as is possible. Every step of the way there is room for speculation and errors of interpretation. A coherent argument will have to be hammered out against contradictions and inconsistencies.

STEP 3: In our sources reference is made to two specific occasions on which Caesar is supposed to have shown disrespect for the senate. He is reported to have worn high boots in the color red reminiscent of the boots worn by the kings of Alba Longa, the legendary descendants of Aeneas. In another revealing anecdote Julius Caesar is portrayed as remaining seated while being visited by a number of senators instead of rising to greet them. One ancient source footnotes that Caesar was suffering from diarrhea at the time and wanted to avoid producing embarrassing sound effects by suddenly moving his body in an upwards position. There is also a revealing story which appears in longer or shorter versions in most of our sources. On the day of the Lupercalia, an ancient fertility festival, an ostensibly drunken Mark Antony tries to put a diadem on Caesar's head. When the diadem is almost touching Caesar's head the crowd starts booing and when Mark Antony lifts the diadem again the crowd applauds. This behavior is repeated on two more attempts. The events take place on 15 February 44 BC.

Here is the best known version of the story (it is also the version that Shakespeare was most familiar with):

The feast of the Lupercalia was being celebrated and at this time many of the magistrates and many young men of noble families run through the city naked [this is not immoral behavior, this is what you do during the Lupercalia, and you strike young women with leather thongs so that they may become pregnant], and, in their jesting and merrymaking, strike those whom they meet with shaggy thongs. And many women of high rank purposely stand in their way and hold out their hands to be struck, like children at school. They believe that the effect will be to give an easy delivery to those who are pregnant, and to help the barren to become pregnant. According to many writers this was in ancient times a shepherds' festival, and has also some connection with the Arcadian Lycaea. Caesar, sitting on a golden throne above the rostra [speaker's platform] and wearing a triumphal robe, was watching this ceremony; and Antony, who was consul at the time, was one of those taking part in the sacred running. When he came running into the forum, the crowd made way for him. He was carrying a diadem with a wreath of laurel tied round it, and he held this out to Caesar. His action was followed by some applause, but it was not much and it was not spontaneous. But when Caesar pushed the diadem away from him, there was a general shout of applause. Antony then offered him the diadem for the second time, and again only a few applauded, though, when Caesar again rejected it, there was applause from everyone. Caesar, finding that the experiment had proved a failure, rose from his seat and ordered the wreath to be carried to the Capitol. It was then discovered that his statues had been decorated with royal diadems, and two of the tribunes, Flavius and Marullus, went round the statues and tore down the decorations. They then found out who had been the first to salute Caesar as king, and led them off to

prison. The people followed the tribunes and were loud in their applause, calling them Brutuses (because it was Brutus [the ancestor of the Brutus mentioned here expelled the last king from Rome and established the Republic] who first put an end to the line of kings in Rome and gave to the Senate and the People the power that had previously been in the hands of one man). This made Caesar angry. He deprived Marullus and Flavius of their tribuneship and in speaking against them he insulted the people at the same time.

Plutarch, *Life of Julius Caesar*, 61 (written in the final quarter of the first century AD).

It is difficult to argue whether this story is a fabrication or whether it is authentic, as you have very few facts at your disposal for the moment. In order to do this you need at least the following facts. You do not know how reliable Plutarch is as an authority on Roman history. You do not know where he may have copied the story from and how much he embellished it to suit his own purposes. You also do not know whether his portrayal of Julius Caesar in his *Life* is overwhelmingly positive or negative.

To complicate things even further, hostile and favorable accounts of Julius Caesar co-existed. Keep in mind that with the accession of Augustus as the first emperor in 27 BC Julius Caesar becomes the founder of the Julio-Claudian dynasty which ruled Rome until AD 68. In the official representations of the ruling dynasty he is obviously not singled out as a cruel tyrant or as an oppressive despot. However, there always existed a hostile tradition towards certain of his political actions which later emperors did not bother to attack. Even Augustus could benefit from a contrast with Julius Caesar. He was the more cautious ruler who established an enlightened monarchy instead of a tyranny. How likely is it that this story formed part of a tradition favorable towards Julius Caesar?

Even without these facts at our disposal we can interpret this story with enough critical attention to draw some important conclusions.

Exercise: Try to answer the following questions:

Is there anything in the story which strikes you as unlikely to have been authentic? Why? Is there any reason to assume that it was Caesar who designed this plan to test his popularity? What would be his motive for doing so? Is that motive credible when it is placed against other elements in the story?