Of Gods and Monsters: Myth and the ancient Greeks

Course Outline

This course aims to provide students with little or no prior study in classical studies or ancient history, a clear understanding of the uses of myth in ancient Greece. Over the course of the module, students will be introduced to the social, political and cultural role that myth plays in Greek society; and to facilitate their learning, students will be encouraged to consider a diverse range of textual, artistic and archaeological materials, such as poetry, historiography, funerary reliefs, inscriptions, and pots and vases. The course will ultimately (1) illustrate how employing such evidence helps us to understand the role myth played in ancient Greek society, and (2) highlight some of the way(s) in which (re-)telling myth helped shape Greeks’ understanding of—and interaction with—their environment.

Course aims & objectives

On completion of the course, students will be able to:

- identify and understand some of the key strands of ancient Greek myth, which recur in an array of different media.
- understand and explain the different contexts for myth in Archaic and Classical Greece (e.g. in sculpture, art and literature).
- appreciate the social, religious and cultural dimensions of various myths circulating in the Greek world.
- give a broad overview of myth in Greek literature, starting with Homer’s *Iliad* through to Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica*.
- show some awareness for the different critical approaches to Greek myth in the twentieth- and twenty-first century.

Course Structure

The course will consist of six one-hour lectures, which will each be followed by a corresponding seminar. The seminars will address—and elaborate—on the themes and issues raised in the lectures. All materials needed for the seminars will be provided at the end of the previous lecture/seminar.
Lecture Programme

1. Introduction to the module & key concepts.
2. The Iliad and the Odyssey: Myth and society.
3. Representations of Theseus and Herakles before and after the Persian wars.
5. Jason and the Argonauts.

Seminars

The seminars will be opportunities for students to participate in discussions that arise from topics discussed in the lecture. Classes will last for approximately 1 hour.

Core Reading

Students are strongly encouraged to acquire a copy of the following text:


Students may also wish to consult the following key works (many of which are available in the Sydney Jones Library):