

ANT2800 (Classical Mythology): Home Exam, Spring 2021 (19 May 2021): Assessment Guidelines

Course description: <https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ifikk/ANT2800/index-eng.html>

Course content: ANT2800 offers an introduction to the mythology of the Graeco-Roman world through an examination of its divinities and heroes in the textual and iconographic sources of Greek and Roman culture. It looks at the role of mythology in the cultural and religious milieu of antiquity, the relationship between humanity and the supernatural/divine, the moral questions posed by these stories, and the reception of classical mythology in post-ancient media (literature, art, film, etc.). The course also looks into the historical development of the study of mythology and gives an overview of the most influential theories of myth.

Teaching in Spring 2021: in accordance with UiO's infection prevention measures against the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no physical/synchronous lectures in Spring 2021. Instead, lectures were podcasted and uploaded on Canvas on a weekly basis. Additionally, an optional online colloquium was offered on Zoom each week where the students were given the opportunity to ask questions and to engage in discussions with their fellow students and the professor. The textbooks used were: Jenny March, *The Penguin Book of Classical Myths* (London 2009), and Fritz Graf, *Greek Mythology: An Introduction* (Baltimore 1996). This principal reading was supplemented by several pieces of primary and secondary reading (e.g. excerpts from texts such as Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Hesiod's *Theogony*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, and articles and chapters e.g. from introductory volumes such as *A Companion to Greek Mythology*, ed. by K. Dowden and N. Livingstone, Malden 2011). All lecture material (except for the two main text books) was made available either through Leganto or on Canvas and was relevant to the exam. The teaching language was English.

Exam form: under normal circumstances, the exam would have been a 4-hours school exam, but because of the infection prevention measures, the format had to be adapted to a 4-hours home exam. It consisted of two parts that both counted 50%. In the first part, the students had to write 4 short essays; in the second part, they had to write a long essay. A separate grade was given for both parts; the final grading was based on the mean. The following general instructions were given:

- You must write full and coherent sentences.
- You must strictly adhere to the required word range. A deduction will be applied for texts that are either too short or too long.
- When you quote literally (or near-literally) from an existing source (i.e., from a book, an article, a webpage, the lecture, etc.), you must use quotation marks and reference the source properly. However, it is recommended that you quote as little as possible (only when it is absolutely necessary).
- You can choose whether you want to write the exam in English or in Norwegian. If you write in Norwegian, please make sure that the spelling of names and technical terms follows Norwegian conventions.

Part I: 4 short essays

Here the students had to choose 4 out of 6 topics (if someone wrote on more than that, only the first 4 essays were read and marked). The word range was 200 to 400 words per essay. There is no fixed template here, but the following points may give an indication as to what a good answer should encompass:

- 1) Give a sketch of how the concept of immortality was conceived in classical mythology.
 - The gods in classical mythology are by default immortal; this (along with eternal youth) is what distinguishes the gods from the humans most clearly.
 - Despite their immortality, the gods have not always existed, but they were once created (as part of a larger cosmogony) or born (as offspring from two immortals).
 - Demigods (i.e., the offspring of one mortal and one immortal parent) are by default mortal, but there are exceptions (e.g. Dionysos being immortal despite his status as a demigod; Herakles being immortalized at the end of his life).
 - The status of lesser divinities such as the nymphs is not consistent: sometimes they are considered to be immortal, sometimes mortal (but long-lived).

- 2) Give a sketch of how anthropogony was imagined in classical mythology.
 - There is no consistent concept of anthropogony in classical mythology.
 - According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, the humans simply are there at some point in the creation process of the world.
 - According to Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Zeus (and the other gods) created several generations of humans ('trial and error').
 - According to later sources, the Titan Prometheus was imagined to be the creator of humankind (whereas in Hesiod's poems, he was just a helper of the humans).

- 3) Comment on this picture: which character is depicted, where is the depiction from, and what is its wider context?
 - This is Herakles on a silver coin from the Greek isle of Thasos.
 - On Thasos, Herakles was worshipped as a god proper, that is, he was part of the local pantheon. Only gods (but not demigods) were depicted on coins.
 - In a wider context, Herakles' cult on Thasos ties up with the divine-like status that Herakles had in many parts of Greece (typically, Herakles was imagined to have been immortalized at the end of his life).

- 4) Comment on this picture: which mythological scene is depicted, which characters are involved, where is the depiction from, and what is its wider context?
 - The scene depicted here shows the 'wedding' of Mars (Ares) and Venus (Aphrodite) on a Roman wall painting from the city of Pompeii. In the middle, Amor (Eros), the personified boy-god of love, is depicted; the others are bystanders watching the scene.
 - The wedding scene actually recounts an 'impossible' story because Mars and Venus only have an extramarital affair. The role of the curious onlookers might be interpreted accordingly in this context.
 - The scene was well known in classical mythology, and it was popular in Pompeii.

- 5) The Homeric epics are full of prolepses and analepses. Explain what prolepses and analepses are, what their function in the Homeric epics is, and why they are important for our knowledge about classical mythology.
 - Prolepses and analepses are accounts of, or allusions to, an incident that does not actually form part of the narrative frame of a given story. A prolepsis is a foreshadowing; an analepsis is a flashback.
 - Homeric prolepses and analepses are important because they allow the narrator to tell stories that are actually not covered by the story's narrative frame. Thus, in the *Iliad* much of the Trojan War is narrated although the *Iliad* only covers a few weeks, and in the *Odyssey* Odysseus tells his adventures in a first-person narration.
 - Homeric prolepses and analepses are important for our knowledge about classical mythology because they provide us with vital information about what happened outside the narrative frame of the Homeric epics.

- 6) Give a sketch of Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of myth.
- Claude Lévi-Strauss developed an influential theory of myth in the 1950s and 1960s. This theory is characterized by a *structuralist* approach to the study of myth. (A good essay should also briefly explain what structuralism is and mention that structuralism is essentially a linguistic theory. Lévi-Strauss, in turn, was actually an anthropologist.)
 - According to Lévi-Strauss, myth is a communicative system exactly like language (in fact, myth *is* a form of language) consisting of isolated narrative units, so-called mythemes, that are analogous to phonemes and morphemes in language.

Part II: long essay

Here the students were presented with the following task: Imagine you had to give an introductory lesson on Roman mythology to an audience without any previous knowledge about the topic. Give a detailed outline of how you would structure such an introduction: which aspects/topics/stories would you cover, what would be in the centre of your presentation, etc. – and why? Your outline should include both *what* you would include and an explanation as to *why* you would include these points (i.e., please discuss your choices on a meta-level).

The word range was 800 to 1400 words. There is no fixed template here either, but the following points may indicate what a good answer should encompass:

- A presentation and discussion of the nature of Roman mythology as an amalgamation of genuinely Roman myths, myths imported (and adapted) from Greece as well as Greek myths taken as a model for Roman mythology (such as Vergil's *Aeneid* that is based on the Homeric epics, but has its decidedly Roman texture) must be included.
- Likewise, a presentation and discussion of the two most important Roman 'national' myths, namely, Romulus & Remus and Aeneas, is crucial.
- Furthermore, the nature of the Roman *Dii consentes* in relation to the Greek Twelve Olympians, is also of importance. (A good essay may also draw the line to the Proto-Indo-European origin of these divinities.)
- Two main differences between Roman and Greek mythology should also be mentioned and discussed, namely, for one, the largely local nature of Roman myths, and, for another, the typically political and/or historical nature of Roman mythology.

Prof. Silvio Bär
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Appendix: pictures (short essays n. 3 and 4)

