

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

# GREEK CULTURE

## **Course Description**

Greek Culture explores the culture of ancient Greece, with an emphasis on art, economics, political science, social customs, community organization, religion, and philosophy.

## **About the Professor**

This course was developed by Frederick Will, Ph.D., professor emeritus from the University of Iowa.

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## Week 1 Introduction

**Greek culture.** There is Greek *literature*, which is the fine art of Greek culture in language. There is Greek *history*, which is the study of the development of the Greek political and social world through time. Squeezed in between them, marked by each of its neighbors, is Greek *culture*, an expression, and little more, to indicate 'the way a people lived,' their life-style. As you will see, in the following syllabus, the 'manner of life' can indeed include the 'products of the finer arts'—literature, philosophy, by which a people orients itself in its larger meanings—and the 'manner of life' can also be understood in terms of the chronological history of a people; but on the whole, and for our purposes here, 'manner of life' will tend to mean the way a people builds a society, arranges its eating and drinking habits, builds its places of worship, dispenses its value and ownership codes in terms of an economy, and arranges the ceremonies of marriage burial and social initiation. The course we outline below will touch on several main registers of ancient Greek culture, 'the way it was lived.'

**Culture and literature.** Some fine-tuning is needed here. Ancient Greek culture lasted for a millennium, from 1000 B.C. to the birth of Christ, and changed constantly through time as patterns of population change, institutions decay and are replaced, and artistic styles come and go. But there is more diversity to account for than appears in this statement of diachronic diversity. Greek culture is unusually rich at any given period of Greek culture. We will stress Athens in the classical period—fifth century B.C.—but there was a vividly different lifestyle in other *polises*—Thebes and Sparta, for example—to which we will pay little attention. We will try to give some sense of lifestyles in other regions than Athens and at different periods of Athenian history, but for simplicity's sake, to repeat, the fifth century in Athens will be our default position.

**Class texts** Two physical texts will be useful possessions for the English language user of the following syllabus. I refer to James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (New York, 1997); and Mary Beard, *Classics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2000.) (Both of these books should be available at the bookstore, for a reasonable price, or at any good library.) The first book, that of Davidson, will survey classical Greek literature (history, culture) from a close up and personal perspective: eating habits, love making habits, money-saving and expenditure habits, intimate views of how the state works in the individual life. At the same time, in the midst of this provocative reading, you will find yourself transported to the true feel of living with the ancient Athenians, a trick rarely accomplished in classical scholarship. The second book, by Mary Beard, is short and sweet and yet held firmly together by concentration on the nature and fate of a single ancient Greek temple, at Bassae. You will marvel at how the complexity of the classical tradition can be unfolded from that one architectural document. To both of these texts you can easily add the individual volumes of the Loeb Classical Library—a complete facing-page set of translations of all significant texts remaining from Greek literature-- which provides facing (not very lively) translations, and in which every text you will take interest in here will be represented.

**Other Texts** For our work on Greek visual art, political life, sports, religion, farming, which will compose a large part of the class, we will use a variety of suggested texts, among them online work. In this increasingly diverse publishing world you will certainly find many valid reading solutions different from the assigned material given with each week's discussion. You are here to educate yourself, and should feel free to use significant resources wherever you can find them. Counting on your resourcefulness, the creator of this course has not hesitated to include suggested texts which would be hard to find except in a good research library, nor has he hesitated not to go onto the online literature, which doubtless the student can peruse more skillfully than he. Of particular note, the visual

materials, which are of special importance in Chapters 2 to 4, can easily be found at many sites on the internet, as well as in any comprehensive History of Western Art.

**Assignments** There will be a separate reading assignment for each week's work, as well as (at the end) a brief list of collateral readings for enriched understanding. You will note that there are three paper writing assignments. These assignments are due in weeks five, ten, and sixteen; you will need from the start to look ahead to the writing topics that interest you. Please start from the beginning to think and plan for that challenge. Would you like to incorporate diary material into that writing? Would you like to link the assignments together? These are options you might want to discuss with your instructor, from the beginning. Finally, note that there are three discussion questions included with each week's assignment. These questions are intended to set you thinking, perhaps to give you ideas for written assignments, and to suggest ways of reflecting back onto the week's work.

## TEMPLES AND THEIR ART

### Week 2 The Greek Temple

**What is a Greek Temple?** A Greek temple is the sheltering architectural building, located within a sanctuary or holy precinct, which evolved into the Greek community's place of worship. These pregnant sites can be found widely scattered throughout the Greek world, and densely placed at appropriate settings within the Greek city-state. (Appropriate? Temples were located in places traditionally associated with this or that deity, or, given a newly chosen site, in places suitable for a new house of the god—on a mountain top close to the home of Zeus, on a promontory over the sea, fitting for a home to Poseidon, or in the forest, in a locale natural for a tribute to the huntswomen goddess, Artemis.) Needless to say—and we can trace major changes through all cultures' architectural histories—there were many *stages* of temple construction in Greece. In the earliest stages, probably in evidence from 600 B.C. on, temples began to be constructed in stone, replacing wood and mud brick structures preceding them on the same site. (By the nature of the case we cannot verify the pre existence of these wooden predecessors, but there are good reasons to suppose that throw away materials like wood, stone, or clay were the initial god houses for the Greeks, and that as they consolidate the character of their religious beliefs, the Greeks accordingly consolidated the form of their temples. There are, though, competing theories of the source of the ancient Greek pre-temple temple. One theory is that Mycenaean architecture, which flourished in the Archaic Age of Greece, and which dominates in the great fortresses of Mycenae and Tiryns, in the Pelopnnesus, provided the initial impulse for the Hellenic temple architecture. A second view is that Egyptian art was the inspiration for at least many elements of the Greek temple, like the Ionic order columns, which clearly work off of Egyptian floral motifs.)

**How did Greek temples change over time?** The earliest temples were in a style called Doric—from a traditional name for the earliest settlers in Hellas—constructed originally at Corinth, and marked by strong somewhat squat columns. The Corinthian style of temple architecture came into presence in the fourth century B.C., and was called Ionic when the Ancients began to analyze their own art history. Although the Corinthian column, and many of the details of capital, architrave, and frieze, differed more or less sharply from the Doric model, the overall structure, of all early Greek temples, was roughly the same. There were, however, changes through time, as well as variations within each style. It is important, here, to look at photos which bring out those changes. Take, for example, the Temple of Hera at Paestum (550 B.C.), the Parthenon in Athens (447-432 B.C.) and the Temple of Apollo at Didyma in today's Turkey, begun in 313 B.C. Both of the first two temples were Doric in style, the third features massive Ionic columns.

**Who made the Greek temples?** By the classical period, the fifth century B.C., major temples such as those on the Acropolis at Athens, were created by noted architects. Ictinus, contemporary with the renowned *archon* Pericles, was noted for his head architect role in the creation of the Parthenon, the central structural brilliance on the Acropolis, or the Temple of Bassae in the Peloponnesus, and for an important temple at Eleusis. Phidias served as the master administrator, and artistic director of the art work on the Parthenon, while Kallikrates, a distinguished architect and 'city planner' in Athens, served as a third leading force in the making of the Acropolis-temples, most prominent of Athenian projects.

**The Acropolis and Parthenon.** It is worth considering the setting of the Acropolis-Parthenon project, for it is an example of the most ambitious effort to be found among the city-states of Greece. By the time construction began, on an Acropolis already housing various sacred structures, Pericles had proven his superior leadership, building, with the island states of the Aegean, a military alliance which gave Athens pre eminence in Greece. Pericles put himself in overall charge of construction of the Parthenon, the cost of which, for the first year's work, was 5000 talents (some 3 billion dollars at today's rate). The project took fifteen years, was largely financed by money from the treasury of the Delian League—Athens's naval alliance—and involved the quarrying of 20 thousand tons of marble from Mount Pentele.

Who made the Greek temple? Pericles? Iktinos? Or Iannis who quarried the marble and dragged it down from the mountain?

**What went on in the Greek temple?** The broad answer is that the temple was largely a storage area, and not a place for the rituals of worship. (Rituals—prayers and sacrifices—would normally take place outside the temple, in the sanctuary precinct.) The temple itself, of course, was an *overwhelming* storage area. The structure would be oriented toward the East, so that the rays of the morning sun came in through the giant front door of the structure, incrementally lighting more of the *cella* (or *naos*), the nave of the building, until the cult statue itself, which was at the far western end of the nave, was touched or even covered with light. In addition to the cult statue, which loomed over the hall around it, there were typically an altar, tables for votive offerings, and personal treasures dedicated to the deity enshrined there. ...It would be worth concluding our effort, to describe the awe evoked in the temple, by including a passage from the Greek traveler Pausanias. He is describing the cult statue of Athena in the Parthenon.

*The statue itself is made of ivory, silver and gold. On the middle of her helmet is placed a likeness of the Sphinx ... and on either side of the helmet are griffins in relief. ... The statue of Athena is upright, with a tunic reaching to the feet, and on her breast the head of Medusa is worked in ivory. She holds a statue of Victory about four cubits high, and in the other hand a spear; at her feet lies a shield and near the spear is a serpent. This serpent would be Erichthonius. On the pedestal is the birth of Pandora in relief.*

Assignment:

Mikalson, Jon, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Chichester, 2010), pp. 1-51.

Fullerton, Mark, *Greek Art* (Cambridge, 2000). (This text is the basic assignment for Weeks 2,3,4, and is to be read over that period of time, for it will shed light on aspects of Greek religion and art that are launch pads for our course.)

Discussion questions:

Do you see a peculiarly fitting relation between the form of the Greek temple and the nature of the religion practiced in it? Gothic cathedrals, in mediaeval Christian tradition, might seem to be extending spires toward heaven. Does the Greek temple in any comparable way suggest the meanings internal to its form?

Does there seem to be any overall 'administration' of Olympian religious practice? This question may sound absurd! Is there a Greek Vatican? A Supreme religious court? The answer is basically no, but then what assured uniformity of practice, from one temple site to another? Was there a completely autonomous priesthood in each *temenos*?

What function did light play in disclosing the cult statue in the Greek temple? Was the semi-darkness, which much of the time enclosed the cult statue, a protective device to enhance awe? Why did most of the actual worshipping take place outside the temple itself?

### **Week 3** Greek Sculpture

**Sculpture and the Greek temple.** Ancient Greek sculpture belongs to the same creative impulse as the ancient Greek temple. However Greek sculpture was only in part a coproduct of Greek temple architecture. The period during which Greek sculpture was created on actual works of Greek architecture would be the 5<sup>th</sup> century classical period, and would involve sculptural works on metopes and pediments as well as on the extensive friezes we find on temples dating from the mid sixth to the mid fifth century. Of those ornamental sculptural works, whose *raison d'être* is to complement the temple, we find a blindingly skillful fusion with the temple, so radiant that in instances like the sculptures of the Parthenon, or of the Nike Temple on the Acropolis, the sculptural work is a seamless whole with the temple itself. (The Parthenon frieze, subsequently called The Elgin Marbles, for Lord Elgin dismantled the frieze from its pediment in the 18th century and transferred it to the British Museum, would be a central example of the brilliance of the welding of sculpture and architecture.)

**Non-temple sculpture.** A great deal of ancient Greek sculpture was created independent of temple architecture, and for those examples—early bronzes, archaic *kouroi* (youthful male) and *kourai* (maidens), free standing life sized sculptures often found in temple precincts, fourth and third century 'genre' sculptures like the Hermes of Praxiteles (320 B.C.) or The Dying Trumpeter (230 B.C.)—for those examples any aesthetic alliance with Greek temple architecture would be hard to formulate.

**What are the landmarks of this sculpture?** To attempt such a formulation, to reach toward an aesthetic which would be in common both to Greek temple creations and to further domains of Greek art—like ceramics or painting—would be to start this Greek culture syllabus on the right course, looking for the characteristic traits of ancient Greek culture; we will look for that unity as we advance and when we conclude. If we look at the developmental curve of free standing Greek sculpture, that is sculpture not part of temples, we see that it changes dramatically in character from the earliest remaining examples to the work of Hellenistic sculptures.

**Greek naturalism.** Look, for starters, at the Man and Centaur sculpture in bronze from 750 B.C. This example, of work in the geometric style, is a starkly abstract reminder of the kind of Near Eastern stylized art which was to generate many visual themes in subsequent Greek sculpture. This style, however, marks off sharply from the life-sized sculptures in stone which begin to spring from Hellenic workshops after 650 B.C. The creations we call *kouroi* (youthful nude standing males) and *kourai* (clothed standing maidens) pick up the stiff

frontality of contemporary Egyptian culture, and speak for the aesthetic values of an age truly called Archaic, and soon, by the early decades of the fifth century, to transition off into free standing sculptural works of an entirely more 'naturalistic' cast, like the dying warrior (480 B.C.) or the Poseidon (460 B.C.) found in the sea off the Temple of Poseidon at Sunium.

**Trends in sculpture history.** Among these rapidly transitioning phases of Greek sculpture one struggles to see a pattern; and yet the 'sense of the cultural movement,' which is passing through social as well as art life, is that of increasing 'naturalism' in literature, the visual arts, even in philosophy, where concrete efforts are being made to identify the 'material composition' of reality. (To put 'naturalism' at the apex of this movement is doubtless a byproduct of our own cultural comfort with realism in the arts, a byproduct challenged in our own times by such art movements as Modernism in painting—Braques, Picasso—which make the abstract and often starkly non-representational—remember the bronze Man and Centaur from 750 B.C.—seem to be the center of mankind's visual universe.) If we go beyond the consummate works of the mid-fifth century sculptors we may jump sharply ahead into such work as the coy statue of Aphrodite of Cnidus (360 B.C.) which is created in the era of Plato, Xenophon, and Menander. In that statue we have gone into a world profoundly different from that of the *kourai* of the Archaic Age, some of which were still under creative production not much more than a century earlier, and examples of which abound at Greek sanctuaries throughout the Mediterranean world in the fifth century B.C. 'Finally,' if we want to skim examples of this trend toward 'naturalism' in sculpture, and then beyond it, into the attitudinal coyness of our Aphrodite, we will find ourselves looking at sculptural work like The Dying Trumpeter (230 B.C.) which fully represents the Hellenistic comfort with the depiction of heartfelt emotions, often enough tinged, as here, with the hue of sentimentality.

**Is a single Hellenic aesthetic emerging, as we peruse works of ancient Greek temple construction and sculpture? Are we finding a Greek signature on the creations we address in Weeks Two and Three of our course?** This question is rendered difficult by the obvious fact that the Hellenic artistic sensibility is in constant change, from era to era. In temple architecture we careen from the massive Doric columns of Paestum in sixth century Italy, to the perfect Doric harmonies of the Parthenon, to the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The correlative history of Greek sculpture, from an Archaic *kouros* to the Dying Trumpeter, will track a sequence of style and worldview changes which are easily as dramatic as any in the realm of architectural history. Would we like to say that a celebration of light, harmony, the deeply human, pervades the high point works of the fifth century, both in temple architecture and in sculpture? Such an assertion would correspond to the overall evaluation, in Western culture, of the progress, peak, and decline of the visual arts in the Hellenic world. Anything like such an assertion would rely on tried and true belief that Humanism surges to the fore with the mid-fifth century genius, and that this is the moment to which our attentions turn as to the absolute center of the Hellenic achievement. Clearly this would be a culturally loaded way of seeing Greek visual art.

Assignment:

Fullerton, Mark, *Greek Art* (Cambridge, 2000). (This text is the basic assignment for Weeks 2,3,4, and is to be read over that period of time, for it will shed light on aspects of Greek religion and art that are launch pads for our course.)

Discussion questions:

From what you gather about Greek sculpture, do you feel its development moves in tandem with the development of Greek history in the broad sense? Or is this just metaphorical talk? Is historical development too broad a theme to be correlated with something as specific as the development of an art tradition?

Why are the classical Greek temples structures so profusely ornamented with sculpture? Do architectural structure and sculptural decoration fit together well? Do they—as, say, on the Parthenon frieze or the Nike Temple on the Acropolis—reinforce one another? How does this relationship work itself out in contemporary world religious edifices?

Are you comfortable with our viewing sculpture (and next week pottery) as expressions of 'culture' rather than only as expressions of 'art history?' Does art seem to you to spring from the same foundations as daily life, religious worship, and military action?

#### **Week 4** Greek Pottery

**Why start with art?** Our course is on ancient Greek 'culture,' which means, as we said in the Introduction, 'the way people lived' in ancient Greece. Why then begin with three weeks on art, the third of which, before us now, is about a minor art, pottery (and the painting on it), not temple architecture, which plainly interacts with the central cultural traits of a people?

**Greeks as aesthetes.** The ancient Greeks were an aesthetic people, for whom the beautiful, or 'sensuously attractive,' was of the highest importance—in dress, in domestic architecture, in monumental architecture, in literature, and of course in the visual arts. (In this they were a different culture from, say, that of Canada or the United States, cultures in which attention to the arts has customarily been subordinate to affairs of state, business, or practical achievement.) Therefore, the Greek artistic achievement as a whole is the most meaningful vehicle of Hellenic influence on and importance to, the world. But **pottery**? Isn't that going too far?

**Developments in pottery history.** The fact is that the curve of development of Greek pottery, and of the painting decorating it, closely follows the curve of development in the other arts. We go back, as we did with the development of the temple, or of sculpture, to breakthroughs, in the Archaic Age of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, into what we must recognize as a new humane, naturalistic, and 'realized' form of expression. (There we are again, repeating a pretty typical Humanist account of the movement of Ancient Greek culture, a movement taught us, in the early modern eras of our own culture, to view as consummated in the great works of the fifth century B.C.)

**Pottery trends.** We have mentioned a 'geometric' bronze sculpture, of a man and a centaur about to fight, dating from the mid 8<sup>th</sup> century. This work belongs to an art period of which we might want to say, that it prioritizes linear, often stark juxtapositions of forms, or, in the case of the pottery beginning to proliferate at the time, functional and often linear vessels designed each for a particular purpose--*amphoras*, for the burial of human ashes, and later for wine and oil transport; *aryballoi* for perfume jars; *kraters*, for wine or water storage. The juxtaposition of figures on the *aryballos* of the Ajax painter, from the early 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., will convey the geometrical notion. The *aryballos* in question is only 2 7/8 inches in height—which will give an idea of the finesse of the work, which depicts a stylized band of animals around the neck of the tiny vase, and on the side full height warrior portraiture. For a tall counterpoint, to this miniature perfume jar, contrast the Dipylon amphora (750 B.C.) from the Dipylon Cemetery in Athens. This five foot tall amphora served as a carrier for funeral ashes, and in its height, and intricacy of geometrical designs



and stylized figures, would have served as a forceful indicator of the wealth and status of the cremated. The archaic mode of this work is qualified in a signal innovation: the potter attaches his name to the work, in contrast to the anonymity of earlier workers in geometric pottery.

**Pottery and painting.** Jump from where we are to Exekias, a potter-painter of the early sixth century, a renowned artist known for his numerous reworkings of themes from Homer's epics, *The Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Look at his black figure amphora of Ajax and Achilles playing checkers, at a rare moment of downtime in the course of the Trojan War. (The black figure designs, with red backgrounds, gave the painter room for sharp profiles, while the red-figure paintings, which were a few decades later to win the pottery vogue in Athens, allowed for more illumination and volatility in the depiction of the figures.) The figures are stylized but full of life, edgy, intent; no longer the formal and relatively expressionless presences we see on geometrical pottery.

As we see in the case of Exekias, painting and pottery developed hand in hand, and that will continue to be so until the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., when wall painting sprang out from Hellenistic cultures, and provided a freeing up of new imaginative figural powers, no longer tied to the pottery vehicle. Perhaps the perfect mating, of pottery and painting, occurs during the 5<sup>th</sup> century, in which (480 B.C.) we come on exquisite, and fully felt, scenes like the Douris painter's Eos and Memnon, a small kylix, 10 inches in diameter, on the interior of which is painted a scene of the goddess of Dawn, Eos, lifting her dead and defeated son, whom Achilles has killed and stripped. The emotion of the bereaved mother, and the total extinction of her lifeless son, who lies in her arms, deploys a dignified pathos which may serve as a brief symbol for us, here, for the special purity of achievement of painting and pottery in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

**Wall painting and the aryballos.** From this point on we could follow the development of Greek painting on a course apart from pottery—a course leading toward dramatic Hellenistic wall paintings of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Or we can leave our tale at the point where painting was still an appendage of pottery, where it still finds itself in, for example, the white ground lekythos work of the so-called Reed painter, at the end of the fifth century B.C. We need to concentrate on the figure of the forlorn young man, sitting between two other figures, revealing in a few lines how profoundly he feels the death incinerated in the jar he decorates. We could hardly be more impressed, with the velocity of Greek cultural change, than by thinking from this point back three centuries to the modes of archaic potter artists like the maker of the perfume jar aryballos at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

Assignment:

Fullerton, Mark, *Greek Art* (Cambridge, 2000). (This text is the basic assignment for Weeks 2,3,4, and is to be read over that period of time, for it will shed light on aspects of Greek religion and art that are launch pads for our course.)

Mikalson, Jon, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Chichester, 2010), pp. 206-226

Beazly and Ashmole, *Greek Sculpture and Painting* (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 1-53.

Discussion questions:

Is there such a thing as a minor art, or do all arts equally represent the culture they spring from? Does Greek pottery seem to you to express important aspects of Greek culture? Do

the changes in Greek pottery, from age to age, reflect parallel changes in Greek society itself?

Does Greek pottery seem to you primarily functional—serving a purpose—or primarily aesthetic? Or are the two aspects of ceramic art inter related, so that what is beautiful is at the same time useful?

Does painting seem to be derivative from ceramic ware in Greece? Of course the Greeks and the Myceneans before them surrounded themselves with painting—on frescoes and walls-- but was ancient painting, in the sense of design and portraiture, a derivative of ceramic art?

## THE GREEK STATE

### Week 5 The Polis

**The Polis.** We have devoted three weeks, now, to questions of art; to the nature and development of the Greek temple, to the concurrent developments in the production and enjoyment of two other arts, sculpture and pottery. Clearly these 'art-forms' are closely inter related. The temple is a major vehicle of Greek sculpture, and Greek sculpture the adornment which gives the temple its life and unique statement. Greek pottery is found profusely in temples, as offerings, in temple sanctuaries, where pottery serves as holder of burial ashes and of libations to the dead, as well as throughout the Greek world where a unique blending of form and function makes all ceramic ware a part of the cultural aesthetic. As we have traced some of the developments in these closely inter related art forms, among the Hellenes (especially the Athenians) of the Homeric through the Hellenistic Age, we have of course simultaneously been tracking the course of political history, for the development of the arts, especially in Greece, was at all times an expression of the civic/political life of the Greeks seen in a distinctive optic. To speak, as we have already, of the development of Greek artistry is to speak at the same time of the inner life of the Greek city-state, or such as it was from stage to stage. The ongoing stages of that Greek public life are what we mean by the Greek polis as experience; the state as a working through in temporal stages.

**Growth of the Greek State.** The social civic environment in which the early temples were constructed, the first *kouroi* sculpted, and the archaic amphoras and aryballoi produced was that of a loosely aggregated set of communities—reference here to the Attic plain and Athens its center—in which coinage, ocean going trade and commerce, a local market economy, the stirrings of a homogeneous law code as under Solon—were beginning to take shape as effective aids to group life. Shedding its roots in the clan culture of the epic age, the Greek city-state, already under Solon known as a *polis*, was trying out versions of democracy, blended with tyrannies and oligarchies, which were the staging grounds, if we go with that fifth century B.C. mythology, for the refined city state of the classical moment.

**Civic participation.** From the Archaic Age to the 'classical moment' the arts and the society growing up with them—fashioning temples as daring as the Parthenon, full height sculptures as universally powerful as the Poseidon of Sunium, or as miraculously precise as the Parthenon frieze, statuesque amphorae as commanding as that of the Dipylon Master—were intimately interconnected. After the late sixth century tyranny of Peisistratus, Athens moved gradually toward a citizen-participative political system hardly paralleled in world history, in which each 'free born Athenian male' was urged to, and did, participate intensely in civic affairs, blending his passion and skills in military affairs, artistic creation, religious

and theatrical participation, and affairs of state. That these privileged and gifted citizens were the necessary condition for the flowering of classical art brooks no contradiction. It has been said that the only comparable citizenries, in fertility of insight and maturity of participation, were those of Florence in the Renaissance or Kiev in the 18th century.

**The waning of the classical moment.** By the present line of reasoning, and with much simplification, we will want to say that by the later 4th century B.C., when the high stakes citizen democracy of Athens was waning, and intra state conflicts were wasting much of the energy of the various Greek societies, the arts arising from Athens, say, were representing a waning sense of power and imagination. (We have absolutely to exclude Plato and Aristotle--who see out the 4<sup>th</sup> century--from this equation; but then as philosophers their roles were, perhaps, to make sense out of the greatness of already past civic glory.) The literature we see from mid fourth century—Menander, Xenophon—heralds the onset of work which reflects a bourgeois declarative perspective, rather than the daring discoveries of the fifth century dramatists. Wall paintings, with their impressionistic swashes, replace the exact design of the paintings of Exekias, or of fifth century sculpture.

**Arete and Society.** And so on. The point begs to be overdone, and the issue of the relation of society to the arts it produces is notoriously subtle. We have already made it clear, I hope, that these study weeks are *essais*, rather than doctrines. It is fitting, therefore, to qualify all we are implying, about the intertwined glories of art and society in the 5th century, to be reminded of the commentary of Aristotle, at the end of the 4th century, on one perspective that made for the excellence, the *arête*, of fifth century society.

*He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them. In the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female, that the race may continue (and this is a union which is formed, not of deliberate purpose, but because, in common with other animals and with plants, mankind have a natural desire to leave behind them an image of themselves), and of natural ruler and subject, that both may be preserved. For that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature intended to be lord and master, and that which can with its body give effect to such foresight is a subject, and by nature a slave; hence master and slave have the same interest. Now nature has distinguished between the female and the slave. For she is not niggardly, like the smith who fashions the Delphian knife for many uses; she makes each thing for a single use, and every instrument is best made when intended for one and not for many uses. But among barbarians no distinction is made between women and slaves, because there is no natural ruler among them...*

**NOTE: FIRST 1000 WORD PAPER DUE THIS WEEK**

**Assignment:**

Zimmern, Alfred, *The Greek Commonwealth* (Oxford, 1969). This will be a central reading assignment for Weeks 5,6,7.

*The World of Athens: An Introduction to Classical Athenian Culture* (Cambridge, 1985). This will be a central reading assignment for Weeks 5,6,7.

Osbourne, Robert, *Greece in the Making 1200-479 B.C.* (London, 1990) pp. 292-350.

Discussion questions:

Can you translate the idea of the polis, the city-state, into contemporary terms? Are there city-states today, that is cities that function as independent units, with their own laws and constitution? Would Singapore be an example? What advantages do you see to the citizenry if it lives in a city state?

Is the city state a conducive environment for the artist and writer? And thinker? It may be tempting simply to say yes, but we need to remember that most of the Greek city states produced no such brilliant culture as did Athens. Was there some special city-state chemistry at work in Athens?

What are we to make of the large role of slavery in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. city-state? Do you suppose Aristotle's opinion about masters and slaves, cited above, represents the general view of the Athenian citizen of the fifth century? Do you find any evidence of an 'emancipation movement'?

## Week 6 Participation in the Polis

**Greek city states.** The ancient Greek polis was itself a slow development, not easily traced even for the disparate communities of Attica, let alone for the multiple small proto-groupings that were forming throughout the Hellenic world, from the early 8<sup>th</sup> century on, and that were to go on to become the fully formed and generally contentious mini states—more than a thousand of them--of the Greek islands and coastal areas, including Asia Minor, clear through the pre-Christian centuries. The sheer number of these 'states,' and their gradual appearance from the sixth century on, is evidence for the importance of the communal *polis* development, whether in fully democratic form or not, as a social condition in which such enriching life forms as the arts—temple, vase, sculpture—were to find their place.

**Pericles and the State.** The growth of the democratic polis of Athens was driven forward by the regime of Solon, in the early sixth century; for though he was an autocrat he instituted laws, promulgated them for the city, then went away himself to let the community work with his contribution. This small tale exemplifies the kind of freeborn energy with which the nucleating residents of Athens were increasingly to show their distinctive maturity; a self-motivated involvement, with the *polis*, that for no accidental reason constituted them as makers and audience for artistic and literary work of a maturity unparalleled in world culture. The Funeral Oration of Pericles, given a century after Solon, for the first year's fallen during the Peloponnesian War (450 B.C.), pays brilliant tribute to the kind of political participants the Athenians had to be, to achieve their distinctive greatness.

*The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbour for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty.*

The political networking of the Athenian people was so fine tuned, their involvement with one another so earnest, that they did not even give one another dirty looks.

**Non citizens.** The administrative richness of the *polis*, slowly evolved and by the fifth century complex, made demands on the citizenry which were tolerable only because the age was one of exceptional maturity. To be an Athenian citizen, one had to be male, over

eighteen, own land, do military service when required, and be the child of parents who were themselves citizens. (We are about to stress the energy of commitment required simply to be a citizen of Athens. What are we missing? Of course we are missing the non enfranchised, women, slaves, foreign residents in Athens. And are we missing much of the population? Indeed we are. It is estimated that the population of Athens in 400 B.C. was 250,000-300,000, breaking down to roughly 30-60 thousand citizens at various different times during the fifth century B.C. Of the non citizen population, slaves and resident foreigners were almost equally populous; the average family, sometimes even the poorer Athenian family, typically owning two or three slaves, who did everything from domestic to day laborer work. Women, who had no official rights, were generally kept out of sight, in the inmost rooms of the family house.) So the glory that was participatory Athenian democracy, in the fifth century, and in which was embedded the artistic creativity featured in Weeks Two to Five, was the glory of a small part of the total population of Athens.

**The workings of the state.** That having been said, we can feel proper awe for the energy and maturity of participatory Greek democracy. That participation did not need to be enforced (on the whole) because it was viewed as a supreme honor to be part of the service of the *demos*, or people. There were three main bodies in which citizens deployed their constant commitment: the Assembly, the Council, and the Law Courts. The Assembly, in which there were 6000 members, was the central deliberative body of the polis, and met ten times a year to consider major threats, projects, and administrative regulations of the city. One wonders at the self-discipline required to bring order into such deliberations, and must be reminded of the member sense of real power.

*One distinctively Athenian democratic practice that aroused the special ire of the system's critics was the practice of ostracism - from the Greek word for potsherd. In this reverse election to decide which leading politician should be exiled for ten years, voters scratched or painted the name of their preferred candidate on a piece of broken pottery. At least 6,000 citizens had to 'vote' for an ostracism to be valid, and all the biggest political fish risked being fried in this ceremonious way. For almost 100 years ostracism fulfilled its function of aborting serious civil unrest or even civil war. At the end of the fifth century it was replaced by a legal procedure administered by the jurors of the people's courts. Power to the people, all the people, especially the poor majority, remained the guiding principle of Athenian democracy.*

**The Law Courts.** The Law Courts, which proved ultimately too cumbersome, involved citizen juries of hundreds, who heard both sides of cases—prosecution and defence were carried out by the plaintiff and defendant—and who voted straight up and down guilty or innocent. As the cases were argued in three-hour-at-a-time segments, and there was no judge but only a jury, one has to imagine the commitment of time and energy the citizen would be required to expend on this civic responsibility.

**The State and Participation.** In Week Five we looked at the parallel histories of the arts and the Greek *polis*, from the Archaic Age to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. In Week Six our goal was to suggest the development of the Greek concept of the state, the meaning of citizenship, the intense participatory expectations of the citizen, and, above all, to stress the intensity of

state commitment as it bears on the kind of creative individuality we have traced in the making of the Hellenic visual art tradition.

Assignments:

Zimmern, Alfred, *The Greek Commonwealth* (Oxford, 1969). This will be a central reading assignment for Weeks 5,6,7.

*The World of Athens: An Introduction to Classical Athenian Culture* (Cambridge, 1985). This will be a central reading assignment for Weeks 5,6,7.

Discussion questions:

For about a century, the fifth, the Athenians managed to maintain civic commitment, from citizens, at a level rare in human history. Can you think of other examples? How about our own industrialized Western democracies? We are more inclusive than the Greeks with our citizenship, but do we maintain a satisfactory level of participation?

Are you surprised at the level of slavery in the midst of the democracy of 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens? Do you think it surprising that slavery could coincide with participatory democracy? How do you think the system looked from the slave's viewpoint?

What do you think brought this intense participatory democracy to an end? Was it that too much was expected of the citizen? Was it that non-experts occupied too many decisive roles in the polis? Or was it that the people ultimately, after a century of high intensity participation, paid the penalty for excluding so much of their population from the vote?

## **Week 7** Economy and Society in the Polis

**The Polis.** We have tried to profile the parallel curve of the arts and cultural history, as they unfold their ways down the millennium long pathway of Ancient Greek (and largely Ancient Athenian) expressive life. Our attention has steadily been drawn back to the Athenian fifth century, questioning why it deserves its unique attention. By this point, however, we find ourselves squarely inside that century, awed at the level of participatory democracy that went on in the Athens of the fifth century.

**Power and trade.** And rightly awed, at that! For that level of participation, and the culture in which it flourished, is indeed the driver not only of the political democracy we touched in the previous week, but of the economic engine that drove the classical *polis*. There is of course a nuts and bolts history to the building of that economy. In the Archaic Age, through the 6th century, Greece was opening to commerce, transporting goods to and from the mainland, feeding itself (on the whole, but certainly in Athens) from its own agricultural practice. The power of this productive and trading imperium was growing as was the commercial savvy of businessmen with the appreciating availability of newly minted coinage. (Men of commerce were beginning, by the middle of the fifth century, to build

stores of wealth which, still in the absence of anything like capital accumulation or banks, gave them a power that by their time, 450 B.C., had far superseded the material possessions wealth of the previous century.)

**Economy of the state.** The keystone advances, in this economic history, will by mid 5<sup>th</sup> century have gathered around the name of Pericles. This *archon*, elected one of the three *stratego*i (generals) of Athens, in 445 B.C., after the decisive defeats of the Persians, was to remain in office, exceptionally, until his death in 429 B.C. His *figura* was all over the world that was Greek culture in the fifth century. A great speaker, known to us in glowing detail from the commentaries of Thucydides and Xenophon, Pericles both celebrated the free born participatory democracy of his home state, and initiated a central move, the transferral of the Delian Treasury to Athens, which by mid-century had given Athens the wealth-source essential to the great building projects, that would from 450 B.C. on turn Athens into the city of splendor we observe today. (At just this point, think some historians of the Greek polis, Athens turned into an imperial culture, but for the person on the street, living his government and its visible achievements, the glory of his mid-century *polis* would have been a daily experience.) The new Athens of Pericles was at just this point to find its democratic voice in registers previously unimagined.

**The citizen on the street.** How would the person on the street have lived, as well as seen, this transformation? (Remember, the person on the street who was most deeply involved, here, was the citizen, whose lot made up no more than one fifth of the population.) He would have observed, as he went about his multiple civic duties, that many of his fellow managers were poor as churchmice—for the Periclean dispensation saw to it that wealth was no source of political influence or power in this state where all were equals. He would also find, among his fellow citizens, many who were beneficiaries of the government's *misthophoria*, its new policy of paying citizens to perform their civic duties, so that they were economically viable while doing their service. As our friend observes the vast construction projects going up around him on the streets of the city, he is sure to be wondering, and probably to know, where the funding came from.

**The responsibility of wealth.** It will have been easy for him to learn that not only the moneys from the Delian treasury, but the heavy tax revenues which were imposed on the rich, would have been the primary funding sources. If our friend is one of the rich, he will probably—believe it or not—be delighted to be paying his substantial *leitourgia* (tax), which went largely to the promotion of public festivals—like the Greater Dionysia, at which the dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes were performed—or, not infrequently, to the fitting out of huge rowing vessels, *triremes*, which formed the background of the Athenian navy. In all these perceptions of the fast developing polis around him, the fifth century Athenian would have recognized he was in the midst of a growth spurt by comparison with which, say, the world of Solon (early 6<sup>th</sup> century) not to mention Hesiod (8<sup>th</sup> century) would have seemed primitive.

**GNP and population.** One statistic tells a lot, in this regard. It is estimated that 58% of the GNP for Athens in the fifth century was derived from manufacturing—textiles, building materials, wine and oil products, ceramics—while the soil of Attica—which used to be the mother of the Athenians—was able to support only one half of the population of 300,000 by 431 B.C. In ancient terms, Athens had become a throbbing commercial entrepot.

**Protecting the polis.** And how did the Athenians protect themselves, now, in a kind of interregnum between the numerous wars that were to continue plaguing them? They had a standing army, composed of the citizenry themselves, who had their two years of army training as youths, then remained on constant service alert for the rest of their lives. More

immediately, though, how did the Athenians guarantee themselves security *within* their own growingly wealthy city? There were no police! Instead there were ad hoc police mercenaries who could patrol the city—for instance the Scythian police archers, who could enforce law and order, and mercenaries from such places as Libya, who could be called in in a pinch. It is worth adding, to the deterrents to crime, that crimes like theft regularly invited exile or the death penalty.

Assignment:

Zimmern, Alfred, *The Greek Commonwealth* (Oxford, 1969). This will be a central reading assignment for Weeks 5,6,7.

*The World of Athens: An Introduction to Classical Athenian Culture* (Cambridge, 1985). This will be a central reading assignment for Weeks 5,6,7.

Discussion questions:

How did the Athenian state bankroll the large expenditures required, to support such building projects as took place on and around the Acropolis? We have spoken about the moving of the Delia Treasury to Athens. How was this possible without a 'banking system'? You might want to devote some research to this tricky issue.

What do you think about the maintenance of law and order in classical Athens? Are you surprised to know that there was no standing police force? What evidence can you find of the crime level in fifth century Athens? What was the civic effect of a high level of citizen participation?

The pride of the wealthy, in performing citizen duties as supporters of the annual theater festivals, is well documented. Can you see that pride emerging as a natural consequence of the participatory democracy of the time? Can you think of another cultural era—perhaps Renaissance Italy?—when the wealthy were proud to support? Are 'they' proud in our day?

## **PRIVATE LIFE**

### **Week 8 At the Dinner Table**

**Dining in Ancient Greece.** Does this shift in topic startle you? In fact, does the intentionally jerky progress of this syllabus put you on edge? I hope so! I want to stress the absolutely interwoven strands of the relation to his culture of an ancient Greek individual—and this person is increasingly becoming a fifth century Athenian individual, for it is about 'him' that we have the most information—as he lives diverse portions of his existence in history, now a maker or consumer of fine art, now a young soldier, now a gentleman at the dinner table, and, ahead, as a student, an athlete, a lover. So various are the always inter related but seemingly unrelated strands that go into making up an historical life in community.



**Athens today.** A trip to Athens today would be a useable prelude to the understanding of the ancient Greek dinner table. Walk along Sophocles Street where the grain markets are, around the streets to the North of the Acropolis, not far from where the Ancient Agora—marketplace, commercial center, city center—was laid out, and you will see the abundance of produce trucked in every morning from Attica, or the dried figs, local wines, or slaughtered meats that are still, for the most part, purchased as they were in the Fifth Century B.C., for consumption on the day of sale. A walk through these markets—how far they are from plasticized supermarkets—will prepare the student of this Week's readings for a sense of what the artist, philosopher, *strategos*, young soldier, housewife or slave put on the Athenian table on a daily basis.

**The Ancient Mediterranean Diet.** The much touted Mediterranean diet of our moment is not a bad guide to the on the whole rather frugal diet with which the Athenians perforce remained satisfied through at least the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (In the last three centuries B.C. there were diverse tendencies in Hellenic cuisine: from the vegetarianism promoted by the Pythagoreans and Orphics to the indulgences recorded in *The Deipnosophists*, *the Philosophers at the Dinner Table*, a chronicle of gourmandise by Athenaeus, written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.) As we saw in the previous week, the soil of Attica is thought to have produced enough for half of the Attic population in the fifth century B.C. The fundamental yield was in wheat and barley, from which the several kinds of bread were made: flatbread used as a plate and napkin, loaves of baked bread, either to accompany the meal or to serve, along with water, as the meal itself. (The very poor made and ate a flour made of acorns.) Vineyards abounded on the dry sunny slopes of Attica, as did groves of olives, consumed and exported in huge quantity, both marinated and pressed for oil. Sheep and goats, though expensive and not abundant, were well tended commodities around the farms. Honey, herbs, cheeses, spices like thyme: all these products were wrung from the land, and carted into the city of Athens on market days.

From ingredients such as the foregoing, the 'moderately well off Athenian' house put together a nutritious diet, to which on occasion and depending on the pocket book, fish and fresh fruits and vegetables—relatively expensive—could be used to supplement the everyday diet.

**A family dinner.** And what was it like to sit down to dinner in a moderately comfortable Athenian household? (I am thinking of the evening meal—not for example of breakfast, where the main fare might have been barley bread dipped in wine, figs, olives, perhaps—for a special occasion—pancakes—made of wheat, oil, honey, even milk—topped with sesame and cheese.) The family would be seated on chairs, at waist level tables, without cutlery—for fingers did that job—except for the cutting of meat, and dishing of liquids into the everyday pottery *kylix* used for such purposes. The dinner of the day might be *maza*, a basic wheat dish accompanied with vegetable soup, pork (for pork was the cheapest protein on the market, and fish were a luxury), spring water (mixed with wine for the older eaters), and, if the occasion warranted, honey cakes for dessert. And what if we were to upgrade the lifestyle level, of the family in question? We might on rare occasions introduce a specialty like imported caviar, or oysters, or even Black Sea turtles!

**The symposium.** Luxury dining, as everywhere, would be the privilege (and folly) of the rich, and would probably be best sampled at a symposium (men's drinking party) such as we see it in Plato's *Symposium*, or Xenophon's account of the same kind of event. The event would, in this instance, be sponsored by a wealthy man, like the Agathon of Plato's tale, who ushered his guests to their benches—for on this occasion one reclined, rather than sitting in a chair—and invited them through the stages of the symposium, dinner first (with a little wine), and then, after libations and prayers to Dionysus, drinking of wine, accompanied by thirst abetting snacks like chestnuts, beans, and honey cakes. While

conversation took its rolling course—only rarely, as in Plato's tale, a course which moved graciously but soon complexly, into the thickets of metaphysics—the 'king of the banquet' would be chosen, and given his assignment, to adjust the mixture of wine and water to the degree of power that befitted the mood of the occasion. Reposing on benches the symposiasts would then have at it with talk, games, and ultimately, if the mood supported it, love making. Philosophy maybe, but entertainment, satiety, and in the long run hangovers! If the host of the evening—remember that the wife is hidden away at home in the *gynaikeum*—is wealthy and munificent he will have hired musicians, acrobats, and dancers; he will also have disposed his guests in such positional relation to the lampstand target, at which the guests tossed the lees of their wind, that the competition for this almost indescribable male contest game delights the crowd into the wee hours. For elucidation see Wikipedia on *kottabos*. Better than watching the Bears!

Assignment:

Davidson, James, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (New York, 1997) pp. 3-69.

The *Deipnophists*, by Athenaeus (3<sup>rd</sup> century, A.D.) is the golden source for this topic, but the seven volumes are hardly cut to size for this class. Recommendation:

<http://www.attalus.org/old/athenaeus.html>

This internet resource, though a dated translation, will give you fascinating excerpts from Athenaeus's thoughts on Greek hedonism, much of it at the dinner table.

Discussion questions:

Was the average Athenian diet healthful? How would you go about answering this question? Does that ancient diet resemble what we call the Mediterranean diet today?

Many of the dialogues of Plato are set in *gymnasia*, where the flow of conversation opens seamlessly into philosophical questions. Does the gymnasium of Ancient Athens seem to you a valuable matrix of thoughts and reflections? Do you think the exclusion of women from such gatherings crippled the outcomes?

What do you think of the mood of the average Athenian family dining experience? What would they have talked about? Would the children have been participants? What about slaves and servants? Given that even poor families were likely to own house slaves, what role do you suppose those slaves played in family life?

**Week 9** Sex and Marriage?

**Lesbos.** Let's open where the topic is gentle, and the level of complex sublimation high. The sixth century Lesbian poet, Sappho, writes of her beloved, and does so in a subtle indirection which fantasizes the mood of a person in the proximity of Sappho's own girl. The difficulty of the translation is apparent especially in the last stanza, where the particular color of Lesbian sedge is in the balance, and the reader must contribute something personal to the notion of 'cold sweat.'

*'He's equal with the Gods, that man'*

He's equal with the Gods, that man  
Who sits across from you,

Face to face, close enough, to sip  
Your voice's sweetness,

And what excites my mind,  
Your laughter, glittering. So,  
When I see you, for a moment,  
My voice goes,

My tongue freezes. Fire,  
Delicate fire, in the flesh.  
Blind, stunned, the sound  
Of thunder, in my ears.

Shivering with sweat, cold  
Tremors over the skin,  
I turn the colour of dead grass,  
And I'm an inch from dying.

**The thiasos tradition.** Despite the difficulties imposed by distance in time and language, we read into this poem a profound longing of woman for woman, and mark this poem among the many poems and fragments Sappho addressed to women she 'loved.' The farther we go into this Lesbian theme, on the island of Lesbos in Archaic Greece, the more we understand, what we knew anyway, that love and desire dwell deeply inside social practice—as deeply as habits of eating or worshipping. Thus the love group inside which Sappho realized her desire life was a remarkable fragment of Archaic Greek social existence, the *thiasos*, or women's affective group. On Lesbos the *thiasos* tradition, which was destined to die with the change of cultures, brought together, pre-marriage, young women of aristocratic line, in dance, chorus, and pure socialization. The bond holding these lovers to one another was the narrow space they occupied between youth and the married condition, which was without question their social destiny, but the cost of which, to freedom of female affections, could be felt in their bones, and wanted expressing.

**Marriage.** Marriage, then, was without question the woman's destiny in Ancient Greek social life, and the procreation of children was recognized, as openly as possible, to be the purpose of marriage. If we travel with a bride and groom to fifth century Athens, we will find that their wedding itself is simply the keystone in a wide network of affiliations that hold them to one another. As in most pre-industrial societies—and to some extent perhaps in all of them—two individuals who marry are essentially bringing together two different families and their interests. In the Ancient Athenian marriage the bride price, paid by the groom to the bride's family, may be either in cash or land, depending on the status of the groom's family, and it is his responsibility to see to the maintenance of that gift, for the support of his bride, in case of a divorce or death of the groom. In exchange for which the bride commits herself totally to the household and welfare of her husband.

**The new home.** While it is likely that the marriage, between the bride and groom we follow here, was long in the preparation, it will be during the marriage itself that the bride makes evident that she is acting through her own decision. (The revelatory act? During the night time chariot procession, in which the bride and groom are driven to the husband's home, the bride will eat a quince or apple from the husband's larder, thereby signifying her dependence on his provisions.) Flute music will accompany the pair through the torchlit night until they reach the new home that is prepared for them. There they will make the most of the marriage night, receive propitious gifts the next day, and begin their life together.

**Women in the polis.** The new bride's life would from that point on be devoted to taking care of her house and family, performing useful and essential tasks like spinning and weaving, and on the whole remaining indoors, to be seen as little as possible except by her women friends, and in the intimacy of her own house. The husband could, at his own discretion, go on to lead quite a different life. If he were prosperous he could 'go out with the boys' as often as he liked, say to symposia of the sort we noted last week, or to chat with *hetairai*—women who were up for higher class, and expensive, sex, and who were educated enough to talk with men of culture, even indeed with rulers, as was the case of the well known closeness of Pericles with Aspasia. Our married friend could even visit prostitutes, abundant but risky.

**Homosexual love.** Or of course, and this is where our story of sex and marriage grows more Greek and more complex, our male friend could follow the path taken by many of his friends and associates, and deposit his fancy on some handsome young male between the ages of 12 and 17, blooming and innocent, and become the lover of that younger person until the end of puberty, when body hair began to sprout. Were that to happen, and the older man to become an *erastes* to the *eromenos* (loved) youth, a mentoring relationship could ideally be formed, on which the youngster would rely for acculturation into the society, while the older partner could rejuvenate himself with the body of nubile youth. Were this to be the course that matters took it is easily imaginable that our male friend could openly, and pleasurably (to him), embrace a poly-erotic life with which his wife would be 'satisfied.'

Assignment:

Davidson, James, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (New York, 1997), pp. 73-182.

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* (411 B.C.)

Discussion questions:

What kind of learning experience do you see in the *erastes-eromenos* relationship, as it played out in the gymnasium? Would there have been 'content' to this learning? Or was it, as you understand the system, primarily a combination of sensuality with learning the ropes for being a full member of society?

Have you trouble understanding our description of the role of married women in Greek society? Is it possible that we thoroughly misunderstand the intimacies on which the family is based? Is there any way we can penetrate into the *gunaikeion*, and see into the world views of women there?

Does marriage in ancient Athens seem to you primarily a means for bringing families and property together, and thus serving economic rather than emotional needs? Is that true at all of the society in which you yourself live?

## **Week 10** Clothing

**The earliest garments.** Evidence currently suggests that the earliest fabric clothes were worn by humans as early as 100,000 years ago, while the wearing of skins stitched together probably goes back another 500,000 years. So ancient is this initial effort to comply with God's request to Adam, and to protect our fragile bodies against the wind and sun, that we may too easily forget the essential role of clothing in the making feasible of a society.

**Lack of hard evidence.** We have no longer any remnant of ancient Greek clothing. What we know, of what the fifth century Athenian wore, is however evident from vase paintings and descriptions in literature. The basics of what we know indicates a wide range of uses of simple materials.

**Cloth and fabric.** The materials in question are what the land and trade made possible: wool from the farm sheep that many, though far from all, possessed; the occasional imported fabric—such as fleece from Miletus in Asia Minor, fine fabrics in cotton from as far away as India, and linen, from flax available (sparsely) both in Greece itself and in imports from India. We must place this range of fabric and sources against the huge disparity of incomes and locales in Attica, say: the rural Acharnian, of Aristophanes' play of the same name, will have expected his wife or her female relatives to provide the simplest farm wear, while the fine lady in central Athens will have used a tailor, skilled slaves, or household servants to prepare their fabrics for them.

**Spinning.** Obviously, then, there was huge variation in the raw materials of ancient Greek clothing, and in the means of processing it. Across the board, however, spinning has to have been at the root of the clothing industry. The basic process was the same everywhere. The wool selected for use was light weight—for the Greek climate did not require more than that—and made from natural plant dyes, which were applied to the raw wool before the spinning process began. (Prior to the dyeing, the woman in charge did her best to card and wash the wool, and the success of her final product depended greatly on her ability to do this thoroughly.)

**The nature of Greek fabric.** The spinning process involved looms, loom weights, spindles and an agile readiness at patterning and smoothing the developing fabric. We have the impression that the resultant fabric was the white with which we characteristically imagine all surfaces from Greek antiquity—from the marble of temples to the gowns of dowagers. The opposite was the case; temple marble was typically painted, as were the sculptures and friezes on temples, while at least fashionable clothing was noted and prized for its fine palette of colors and designs. (The favored colors were purple, green and gray, while a variety of designs, wavy, geometric, linear were valued, and on the high fashion level served as trend setting markers for the socially conscious.)

**Typical articles of clothing.** And the garments created? To begin where it begins, there were no undergarments. Both sexes wore loincloths in the mid region of the body, while babies wore nothing. Women's wear typically included the *himation* (a large rectangular piece of wool, silk or cotton, draped over the shoulder and tied at the belt, with, under it, a *peplos*, a long fabric piece folded around the body and pinned at the shoulders.) With either of the foregoing a *chiton* could serve as an overgarment, a lengthy tunic worn by either sex, reaching the ankles in women, the knees in men. Over the *chiton* men often wore an *exomis*, a strong thick fabric useful for heavy work. As protection against the hot sun men sometimes wore a broad brimmed hat called the *petasos*.

*Evidence of a thriving linen industry in Greece has been found on clay tablets that date back 4,000 years. Though the Greeks loved to use linen fabric for their clothing, they had other uses for it as well. One of the most surprising applications was for armor. Considered Greek by many, it is believed that Alexander the Great and his men wore linen armor. In fact, Plutarch claimed that Alexander wore a breastplate of doubled (or folded) linen. It is unfortunate that no examples of this armor have survived. However, through descriptions, paintings and sculpture, archaeologists believe they have reconstructed something very similar to Alexander's Kevlar like armor. Called linothorax, the armor was made through*

*laminating several layers of linen with a type of simple glue made from flax seeds or rabbit skins. Linothorax was very strong, a fact that has been proven by archaeologists through rigorous testing. It is through such tests that archaeologists now believe that Linothorax would have held up to the weaponry used in battle during Alexander's time.*

NOTE: SECOND 1000 WORD PAPER DUE THIS WEEK

Assignment:

Laver, James. *Costume & Fashion: A Concise History* (London 1985.)

Discussion questions:

At the beginning of our course we tracked the parallels between political history and that of the arts of sculpture and ceramic. Do you find evidence that the development of clothing styles followed such a parallel course with history? Or has the history of clothing and fashion its own imperatives and a unique course of development?

Does the fact that married women remained largely at home impact the development of the 'fashion industry' in Athens? Or, from what you can tell, did rival couturiers enter the market to set styles? Can you inform yourself about dressmakers and tailors?

In what ways does the clothing available in ancient Athens reflect the climate of the country? Did the type of clothing worn vary from season to season?

## CAREERS AND TRAINING

### Week 11 Farmers and Athletes

**Farmers and farming.** Farmers made up 80 per cent of the population of Attica in the fifth century B.C.; the average farm was four to five acres. (These figures, and others to follow, will vary greatly with other times and places in ancient Greece; climate, soil conditions, and available markets will have varied greatly depending on time and place.) At the same time only some 20 per cent of the land of Attica in the classical period was useable for agriculture; rocks, poor soil, lack of fertilization techniques, and lack of efficient equipment combined to render agriculture a most necessary but a rather precarious occupation.

**The land itself.** Mountains, valleys, rocky hillsides, the occasional rich humus valley and the cultivated mountainside slope; these are the ingredients of the landscape of Attica. On this land certain crops thrived, while others barely survived. Barley—usually not wheat—was the cereal of choice, relatively easy to grow, though less nutritious than wheat. (Many staple dishes were made with cereal grains; stews, soups.) Barley was typically planted in November and harvested in May. Grapes grew abundantly in the Attic soil, and were picked in September. Olives, the third major staple, were harvested from November to February, usually with poles and wicker baskets.

**Vegetables and fruits.** Vegetables were grown in plots which surrounded houses, and on soil which was, to the extent the ancient Athenian fertilized at all, enriched with cuttings of weeds and grasses. Among the favored vegetables: cabbage, garlic, leeks, spices. Small orchards were also widespread. Almonds, figs, and pears were among the common fruits, figs—either dried or fresh—serving as a stable accompaniment to many meals. Beekeeping

was a common rural skill, especially on the slopes of Mount Hymettos, which was known for its honey; and honey along with figs was commonly employed as a condiment.

**The animals.** One has only to wander the Attic hillsides today, all rocks and twisting turns, to realize why sheep and goats were the animals best suited to the farmer's needs. Such sure footed, and relatively light, animals were able to negotiate the hillsides, and to browse the protruding vegetation, while cattle were of rare occurrence except on the plains of the north of Greece. Sheep were invaluable as sources of meat, milk (in cheese form), and leather.

**The life of the farmer.** All in all the Attic farmer could make a living, with hard work, and was not so far from Athens, but what he could attend the major festivals, and, we like to think, some of the plays that have made his time world-famous.

**The athlete.** The successful athlete, on the other hand, could win fame and fortune unparalleled by those in other professions in his society. (Sound familiar?) The potential athlete was from early in life a person of special interest in the Athenian *polis*.

**In the gymnasium.** The young man—yes, our references are almost all to men, here—was likely to be drawn, from the age of puberty on, into the public sphere of the gymnasium. These organizations, which comprised sports arenas, meeting halls, baths, and outer portico areas, were central meeting points for the Athenian people. So important was this component of their society, that the Athenians appointed ten elected officials, *gymnasiarchs*, to maintain and supervise the *gymnasia* of the city. Within the *gymnasium*—the place where you train naked, *gymnos*, learning to value your own body and to admire other male bodies—the young man developed both his athletic prowess, his good physical condition, and also his educational life, for the early stages of education were well supported, at best, by teachings and discussions that took place in the gymnasium. It is said that the greatest expense incurred by the *gymnasia* was the oil which was used to polish and then bathe the bodies of the athletes.

**Sports and poetry.** Those who showed athletic prowess were taken up by the State—so that from the earliest times, from the first Olympian Games in 776 B.C., the reputation of each *polis* was seen tightly wrapped up with the skill of its athletes. With this end in view, the *gymnasiarchs* paid special attention to young men who showed great athletic promise. This meant for the most part training youths in one on one skills, for Greek athletics rarely involved team sports. The sports of greatest competitive interest were footraces, discus and javelin, wrestling, boxing, and chariot racing; individual sports in which meeting one's own personal challenges was the primary driver. The athletes who went on to excel at the Olympic games, or the games held elsewhere in Greece—in Delphi, in the Peloponnesus—and who adorn the pages of some of Pindar's finest poetry, became heroes to their home *polis*, and beneficiaries of the lavish prizes offered by the ceremonial officials of the games, prizes of golden cauldrons or tripods which were enough to render the athlete wealthy for life. And lest that assertion sound too contemporary American, let's add the frameworking which gives meaning to this whole discussion. The games of which we are talking were at each venue dedicated to the deity of the site—so let's not forget the games at Olympus were dedicated to Olympian Zeus, the Father of the Gods. That this was not a mere formality, but a true event commitment, surrounded by sacrifice, prayers, and hopes for the future we will understand better later in this course, when we reflect on the sense in which the ancient Hellenes were truly 'religious.'

Assignment:

Pindar, *Works* Innumerable translations available, but the following site

<http://classics.mit.edu/Browse/browse-Pindar.html>

is good reading.

Aristophanes, *Acharnians* (425 B.C.)

Discussion questions:

To what do you attribute the highly honored position the athlete occupied in ancient Greece? Was it that sports were entertainment, and one of the chief sources of it? Or were athletics an element in the religion of the Greeks?

It has been observed that Greek farm equipment barely changed from the time of Homer to the Roman occupation in the last two centuries before Christ. To what would you attribute that state of affairs?

Of what significance is it that Greek athletics were almost all individual sports, with no stress on team sports?

## **Week 12** Education (*Paideia*)

**Paideia.** The ancient Greek term, *paideia*, which we typically translate as 'education,' conceals in it the noun *pais*, *child* or *boy* (for the educational process was especially adapted for boys in fifth century B.C. Athens.) *Paideia* was, as early as the Archaic Age, the word for a wide concept of social training, in the useful values of the culture. From the start, this notion was directed at the whole person to be educated—body, mind, imagination. Through the fifth century B.C. the functions of education were largely visible on the elementary level, though with the fourth century, we will soon see, the first Greek Universities are in place.

**Educating the young.** In the fifth century B.C. there were two forms of education, both informal and formal. Informal education was close to what we might call home-schooling, with the parents, or another adult in the family, providing beginning training in reading and writing—which were taught together--in drawing and in counting. From early on there was memorization of poetry, practice in writing with the stylus on a wax covered tablet, and training in numbers. The stress on boys' athletics was there all the time, as was the social preparation, for both genders, in music and dance. (It was from this kind of kinaesthetic alertness that the sense of rhythm and metre, in Greek literature, found so ready an audience.) The formal element in this education entered with the hiring of a tutor—a *paidotribe* for the first 'grades'—who would bring more expert pedagogical practices into play for the young men. Both kinds of basic education, of course, were basically the privilege of students from well to do families, while the children of poor families, especially from the kinds of 'farm family' visited in the previous week's class, would from the start be put to work with farm chores.

**The schools.** After the age of fourteen, boys who qualified were sent to secondary school, which could be held in an actual school building, or in the homes or meeting places of public teachers, already in the mid fifth century acquiring the name *Sophists*. At these 'high schools' the students would begin learning the acquired knowledge of their time: natural science, rhetoric, geometry, astronomy, meteorology, as well as the humane arts already opened to the student in the family home, where exposure to poetry, music, and dance was central. It was around the new educational practices of the Sophists, who were itinerant—if



often distinguished—teachers, that a debate broke out which reflected the Athenians' cultural self-questioning toward the end of the fifth century. This was a debate over whether educational training should continue to prioritize physical issues along with intellectual ones, or whether the notion of the whole-person training, which was a marked inheritance from the Archaic Age of Greek culture, was outdated, and too markedly part of the heroic stages of the culture. Vivid debates marked Athenian cultural processing of this issue, and perhaps they still similarly mark our own culture, in which the small college ideal of the 'rounded person' is valiantly contesting the increasingly intellectualist assumptions of the higher education establishment.

**The gym and personal growth.** After the first stages of educational training the young man, now in his early teens, was also exposed to the world of the gymnasium, where he was to find himself in a social milieu which mirrored the values of his society, and which was devoted to promoting his physical and mental well being. We have looked at the nature of the gymnasium last week, in discussing the training of athletes, but we must view it as the prime example of the site for training the whole person.

**The ephebic level.** At a higher level yet, than the high school program just described, there was the more specialized training of the *ephebes*, young men on the threshold of their majority, the age twenty one when they could become citizens. From the training inculcated in these young men we retain, to this day, the following *ephebic oath*, which represents a kind of elite declaration of loyalty by the new generation of Athenian citizens:

*I will not bring dishonour on my sacred arms nor will I abandon my comrade wherever I shall be stationed. I will defend the rights of gods and men and will not leave my country smaller, when I die, but greater and better, so far as I am able by myself and with the help of all. I will respect the rulers of the time duly and the existing ordinances duly and all others which may be established in the future. Furthermore, if anyone seeks to destroy the ordinances I will oppose him so far as I am able by myself and with the help of all. I will honor the cults of my fathers. Witnesses to this shall be the gods Agraulus, Hestia, Enyo, Enyalios, Ares, Athena the Warrior, Zeus, Thallo, Auxo, Hegemone, Heracles, and the boundaries of my native land, wheat, barley, vines, olive-trees, fig-trees...*

**Universities.** In the 4th century, by which time Athenian culture has changed, growing more pluralistic, sophisticated, and questioning, two of the greatest Universities in the ancient world are founded, both on sites and within traditions which hark back to the formative Archaic stages of Greek culture.

**The Academy and the Lyceum.** The Academy of Plato was founded around 387 B.C., and the Lyceum of his pupil Aristotle—who studied for 20 years at the Academy—was founded in 335 B.C. With the establishment of these two centers of learning and discussion the highest ranges of Greek education are attained, philosophies of world significance are established in the course of conversations and lectures, the collection of scientific information made into a public priority, and the more intimate, social-protective virtues of the old *paideia* replaced by what is basically the spirit of the modern research university of our day.

Assignment:

Jaeger, Werner, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (1939.) This is a great book, available in numerous editions, and touching on every aspect of the educational process in ancient Greece. Read as much as you can, starting with what is central to your chosen topics.

Discussion questions:

What do you feel about the degree of literacy in fifth century Athens? Was the culture still oral in many ways, even when the greatest works of literature were being produced?

Was there a publishing industry in fifth century Athens? How were books reproduced? Were there libraries?

The fifth century B.C. in Athens was a period of unique literary power. Do you see the education of the young as likely to lead to that kind of literary maturity? Or was the principle of growth lodged in the structure of life among others in society?

## RELIGION

### Week 13 The Olympian Gods

**Religion on the ground.** We opened this course with a brief discussion of the Greek temple, its origins and developments. We went on, again briefly, to characterize the structure, contents, and basic purposes of the temple. From that point we moved to other but related expressions of the Hellenic aesthetic sense. We looked at ceramics and sculptures, both as they illustrated the temple and its uses, as they changed over the course of Ancient Greek culture. From that point on we moved into a discussion of the Greek state, citizen participation, the movement of money, and then private life—food and marriage and clothing—as well as of two of the careers that unfolded from the heart of Greek society—farming, which occupied four fifths of the Athenians, and athletics, which remained the most honored activity within the polis. What we have dodged so far has been the nitty gritty of the religious life of the Greek *polis*. We could well have gone there in discussing the work of the temple, marriage, athletics, education—for in carrying through those social actions the Greeks of all city states, of virtually all periods, paid attention to their gods and incorporated them in prayers and public ceremonies. We have reserved the last three lesson weeks for attention to the gods of the Greeks, and will begin, this week, with the question of what the Greek gods were, and where they came from. In the following week, 14, we will consider how the Greeks worshipped their Gods. In the penultimate week we will look at critics or sceptics of the religion of the Greek gods.

**The history of the Olympian gods.** The historical origin of the Greek gods is of inevitable interest, but intangible. The poets Homer and Hesiod both work from the belief in an earlier stage of their religion, in which the Olympian gods—Zeus the Father and his team of collegial deities—who, on the whole divided up by their relation to diverse natural forces, emerge as relatively civilizing and creative forces on the front line of the establishment of meaning in the cosmos. For the most part Homer takes his gods into the narrative of his tales—The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—making gods and mortals into intimate friends and enemies with one another, and activating plot by means of 'divine mechanisms.' Hesiod, in his *Theogony*, composed in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and thus probably 100 years later than Homer the creator/rhapsode, tracks the origins of the Olympians back to their own more primitive ancestors. The origin of the cosmos would be the mating of Ouranos (sky) and Gaia (earth), who would in their turn be replaced by their children Kronos and Rhea, Titans and elements of a pre-Olympian set of ruling powers. (By some Greek accounts Rhea was seen as the mother of the Olympian gods and a beneficiary of widespread worship in her own right.) The overall gist of this genealogy is clearly to set the stage for a generation of reason and order. The Olympians come off as correlatives to the human, and though in Homer the Olympian gods play every sort of game with their mortal colleagues, the gods are nonetheless of high order power, shrewdness, and beauty. It is only fate which overrules the Olympians, but against that iron power nothing created is effectual.

**The usefulness of the gods.** We will talk next week about how the Greeks worshipped their gods, but should proceed first to our question of this week; what did the Olympian gods do for their worshippers? I mean to stress the issue of the Greek gods as functions of Greek need. (To answer this question is to override the notion that the Olympian gods were simply an inheritance from Mycenaean or Minoan, or indeed Egyptian religions, and to claim that this inheritance was only made possible by the relevance and 'usefulness' of the Olympian gods to the Greeks.) I am thinking especially of the Olympian pantheon as a whole, and not of the Gods worshipped in particular locales—as the Artemis peculiarly worshipped in Asia Minor, or the Athena uniquely addressed in Athens. I suggest two main accounts of the benefits conferred by the Olympian pantheon on its worshippers.

**The gods as map.** The Olympian pantheon will have been a world organizing map in the mind of its believers. The personalization of natural forces—as we will promote it through mapping a Poseidon behind the roar of the sea, a Zeus in the thunder, an Hephaestus in the forge, a Hermes in the power of speedy communication—will be a way of organizing the world and drawing it close to consciousness. A narrative view of the world will form the framework of daily experience.

**Sacred space.** Apart from the mapping and personalization issues, the Olympian pantheon will have promoted the tendency to sacralize places and qualities (like beauty, power, strength), and thus to hallow many regions of psychology and topography. Much in the world becomes sacred by its proximity to the godly, and though the sacralization in question is deeply anti scientific, and will take according revenges on the anti-technical way Hellenism unfolds, that sacralization builds and grows from imagination that will pervade Greek culture, and lend it its unique stamp.

Assignments:

Hesiod (8<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.), *Theogony*

Buxton, R., *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 1-55.

Discussion questions:

Does what we call Greek mythology seem to you to be a living element in Greek worship of the gods, or is 'mythology' a literary creation developed by later cultures looking back on the behaviors of the Olympian (and other) gods? What is the history of Greek mythology itself?

Do you see the individual Athenian, in the fifth century, as worshipping the wide field of the Olympian gods, or only a patron god dear to his family tradition or locale?

State religions, like the Olympian, usually have to address issues concerning the afterlife. Do you see any evidence of concern for that issue among the expressions of Olympian religion in Athens—or more generally in ancient Greek culture?

**Week 14** Worship of the Gods

**Varieties of religious worship.** As we address these questions we realize, at once, that there were multiple forms of religious belief in Ancient Greece. As recently as the fifth

century B.C., to which we have been devoting much attention, there was a symbiosis of private cult religion with the official 'state' religion devoted to the Olympian gods.

**Worship in practice.** To this point, in discussion of temples and sanctuaries and the meaning imported by the Olympian gods, we have been concerned with the dominant public religion the Greeks believed an important part of remaining connected with the order in reality. The Olympian gods, as we have seen, were the largely divine but partly human presences that the Greek mapped against the sky, acquiring order through this man-created GPM. The worship of these deities was, as we have seen, specific to particular cult sites, and varied through the centuries, but was on the whole conservative and relatively simple. Worship was typically carried out inside a sanctuary (*temenos*) in which stood the temple, with its cult statue and before it its altar; while disposed around the sanctuary, which found itself either in the city or in the countryside, there would be religious-use outbuildings and perhaps a sacred grove. Though there was no official priesthood—just as there was no canonical text of origin (except for the Homeric epics which in a sense served as theological touchstones)—there was an officiant at any religious worship. This individual would supervise the sacrifice and libations that were devoted to a particular deity, and represent the authentic character of the hymns and praises that celebrated the god, thanking him/her for gifts from above. In the course of this sacrificial service—which drew its beauty from the aura of 'giving up'—the worshippers would eat the meat and entrails of the sacrificed goat (or sheep or oxen) and set aside the fat to burn as incense for the honored god of the precinct.

**Ritual and the phallic.** Parallel to this public worship, which we know from Homer on—the Greeks sacrificed before sailing to Troy, the shepherd Eumaios sacrifices in honor of his master, Odysseus; both epics, in short, are pervaded by the atmosphere of sacrifice—there is an ancient and largely subterranean cult religious tradition. This cultic tradition plainly speaks to the need, among the Greeks, to worship in direct connection with their emotions—which were more or less ritualized away in the official religion. (This is a guess. Perhaps an error. The Abrahamic religions which followed Greek polytheism instituted a new level of interiority, which is hard to find a parallel for in what we understand of the Olympian religion. We seem to find, in the Olympian religion, a rhetoric of rite and sacrifice which excludes forms of interiority we can account for.) Many of the themes of Greek cultic religion center around the worship of the god Dionysus, who is regularly associated, in Greek experience, with wilderness, the wild in the human person, ecstasy induced by wine, and the phallic, for Dionysus is in all his faces connected with fertility and with that generative power of the body which is sublimated off, in Olympian religion, into stylized forms, in which fundamental human concerns are 'aestheticized.' The Dionysian either locked out or stylized in the presentations of the Olympian religion. In Euripides' play *The Bacchae*, the forces of an unleashed Dionysian female cult overturn the representative of the state. In that play we see King Pentheus of Thebes humiliatingly driven into cross dressing by the women of his city, who drive him from his power and leave him helpless in a tree!

**The Dionysus backstory.** Here is one version of the backstory, which defies anything except a handbook account—for it takes 'myth' into regions of the social sub-conscious.

*Dionysus (in his incarnation as Zagreus) is the son of Zeus and Persephone; Zeus gives his inheritance of the throne to the child, as Zeus is to leave due to Hera's anger over a child being born by another mother; Titans are enraged over the proclamation of attendance and under Hera's instigation decide to murder the child, Dionysus is then tricked with a mirror and children's toys by the Titans who murder and consume him. Athena saves the heart and tells Zeus of the crime who in turn hurls a thunderbolt on the Titans. The resulting soot,*

*from which sinful mankind is born, contain the bodies of the Titans and Dionysus. The soul of man (Dionysus factor) is therefore divine, but the body (Titan factor) holds the soul in bondage. Thus it was decreed that the soul returns to the body ten times.*

**Dionysus and the mystery cults.** One message of this non-Olympian phantasmagoria, is that the birth of Dionysus represents the persistence in the human of a soul element which can enter and leave the body. This backstory links to the cults of Dionysus, which flourished especially in Eleusis, from where we learn of the growingly powerful Eleusinian mysteries, which merge ultimately into later mystery cults, at the intersection of late Greek culture and the Roman Empire, in the last two centuries before Christ. Into the increasing diversity of Greek religious practices, especially into the new cult milieu which presses forward from the 4th century on, we see merging influential cults like Orphism, later Mithraism, and then, still in a loose continuity with the mystery cults of Dionysus, the salvation cults (like the Gnostics) which compete with the nascent Christian Church in the early centuries after Christ's death.

Assignments:

Mylonas, George, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton, 1961), pp. 224-285.

Burkert, Walter, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 1-82.

Discussion questions:

As you understand the practice, why was animal sacrifice the chosen means of ritual worship in ancient Greece? Were the Greeks one with other ancient peoples in their devotion to this religious practice?

Can you imagine a fifth century B.C. worshipper being an adherent both of the Olympian religion and of a mystery cult? Would there have been a difficult tension between these two allegiances?

Was Homer a kind of Bible for the fifth century B.C. Athenians? Can you see how the two epics of Homer provide models of behavior and practice for later generations?

**Week 15** Religious skepticism and criticism

**Religious orthodoxy.** We all know that the accusers of Socrates made much of his alleged disrespect for the gods. That charge was a serious one, perhaps the most damning brought against him. At the very end of the fifth century, when the Athenian *polis* had passed its moment of greatest public brilliance, a major victory (The Persian Wars) fading into history, a major loss (The Peloponnesian Wars) in their immediate present, the Athenians felt the fragility of their *polis*, and the need to reaffirm its official belief foundations. It might be added that into this uneasy cultural climate entered the influence of the Sophists, those itinerant teachers of knowledge, and of ways, as the dramatist Aristophanes constantly illustrated, of making 'the worse appear the better reason,' the new rhetoric replace the old legal securities that such as Solon, already in the sixth century, had fought to safeguard. These Sophists seemed to the man on the street to be sowing the belief that any belief goes. The Athenian on the street was made anxious by these widespread developments, and Socrates was one of the victims of this climate.

**The nature of belief in ancient Greece.** What did the early Greeks, from Homer through the fourth century, actually believe about their gods? In the previous two weeks' work we have stressed the importance of the gods as maps of reality, aids to order, and the fervent, and omnipresent worship of the Olympian gods throughout Greece—as well as worship of the mystery and fertility cults that prospered alongside the Olympian world. That map of a fervent religious culture was largely constructed from fragments of literature, archeology, painting—the collective evidence of religious observance over the centuries from Homer's time. What level of religious belief do we find as we cruise from Homer through the lyric poets to Greek tragedy in the fifth century, and then to Plato and Aristotle? On the whole we find little challenge to the claims of the Olympian (or cult) religions. We may feel that, for Homer, the gods occasionally appear as human playthings, that for Hesiod a stiff genealogical account of the gods takes the place of real belief, that for the tragedians-- Aeschylus in the *Oresteia*, Sophocles in *Antigone*, Euripides in the *Bacchae*--the gods and their world serve as ways of talking about morality and destiny on the purely human level, but for all that these gods remain principle mainstays of order in the universe.

**Philosophy and Religion.** When we step aside from the literary artistic portrayal of the gods, to the burgeoning traditions of philosophical thought which are flourishing from the sixth century on, in parallel with the Olympian worship, we note that the Gods are largely ignored, to be replaced by independent thought at grips with the uncertainty of the universe. It is at this point, with say the Milesian thinkers of Asia Minor—Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes—that the Greeks begin to envisage a world in which 'gods' play no part, or in which the role of the gods is questioned to the roots. What happens when Thales proposes *water* as the fundamental world substance, and attributes the universe we know to consequences of condensation and evaporation, or when Anaximenes essentially does the same thing with the key principle of '*air*' or '*the cosmic infinite*? What happens is that we take a step into proto-science, we shift our vocabulary of explanation away from the gods. Contemporary to these Milesians is another fifth century thinker like Anaxagoras, who has retained his fame for suggesting that the gods are anthropomorphic creations. It is he who suggested, boldly, that if horses had/have gods, they would be gods in the form of horses. Such thoughts as these are clearly directed against the main religious current of Greek worship.

**Philosophy and Olympian religion.** When it comes to Plato and Aristotle in the fourth century, we will have to say that at the summit of speculative thought, the Greeks retain the framework of the Olympian divine but use it as a vehicle for theology rather than practical worship. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato speaks of the ambience of the divine gods, and of the journeys of the soul in the direction of the Empyrean.

*Many and wonderful to see are the orbits within the heavens and the blessed gods constantly turn to contemplate these as each busies himself with his special duties. There follows whoever will and can [this includes good human souls], for envy has no place in the company of heaven. But when they proceed to the divine banquet, they mount the steep ascent to the top of the vault of heaven; and here the advance is easy for the gods' chariots, well balanced and guided as they are, but the others have difficulty*

**Aristotle and the gods.** For Aristotle, god is pure act, the order of the cosmos at the stage where it is the possibility of all that is. Metaphysics has gobbled up theology, though the metaphysics Aristotle built was to pass on, influentially, to the greatest theologians of the Middle Ages—Averroes, Avicenna, Thomas Aquinas.

**Philosophy on the margins of theology.** Philosophy, in other words, will prove out as a region where the Greeks were able to sustain their belief in supersensual forces, without committing to the practice of day to day Olympian worship.

**Stoics and Epicureans.** Finally it should be added that when we come to the Stoics and Epicureans—Zeno, Epicurus—in the fourth century B.C. and onward, we are among Greek thinkers and moralists for whom the universe is composed of particles in motion, the gods are forgotten except as mainstays for morality, and successful moral behavior becomes a sufficient effort for the human.

Assignments:

Euripides, *The Bacchae* (405 B.C.)

Allen, Reginald, ed., *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle* (1950)

Discussion questions:

Would you say that the Olympian religion was a religion of consensus, without great power to insist on its practices? Or was this religion, which grew up without a Bible or a priestly caste, actually strictly coercive? Was there a penalty for disregarding the religion?

What was the religious view of Plato and Aristotle? Were they believers who took religion into metaphysics? Or non believers, who used the religion of their culture as metaphors of thinking?

Was the Olympian religion concerned with what was in people's souls, as we say, or only with what they did in ritual practice?

## OVERVIEW OF GREEK CULTURE

### Week 16 Overview of Greek Culture

**The spectrum of Greek city-states.** We have tried to look at various aspects of Ancient Greek culture, with a general focus on fifth century Athens, which was in some ways the brilliant apex of the entire accomplishment. (In some ways. There is still much to say about how 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens got enshrined as the golden moment of a very diverse culture, with many kinds of polity and achievement. )

**The main traits of Greek culture?** Notwithstanding some artificiality in our choice of certain moments and places for our biopsy of Greek culture, have we managed to isolate certain traits which might serve as the signature for the achievement of Greek culture? Let's try:

#### 1 *The aesthetic signature.*

**The aesthetics of the Greek temple.** Though our stress has been on the way a society lives its life, and we have accordingly looked steadily at matters like worship, clothing and dining, education and athletics, we have seen the Greek making moves toward beauty and harmony by almost a natural gesture. We began by discussing the Greek temple in several stages. Think of the Parthenon. Even in photos you can see the extraordinary harmony of the relation of length and width in the temple. (This relationship incorporates a mathematical principle of balance constantly repeated in Greek constructions.) The principle of *entasis*, by which the Doric column is given a slight swelling at mid-height, to create the

illusion of a continuously slimming upward column, is a characteristic stroke of genius in Greek temple architecture.)

**Pervasion of the aesthetic in ancient Athens.** The aesthetic has asserted itself here at various points: in, for instance, the sculptures that are appendages and decorations of the temples, or in the pottery so omnipresent in Greek homes, temples, and markets, and which is typically, even in its most functional roles, a product of order and imagination; in the seemingly rituals of marriage, right down to the chariot ride to the groom's house, and the symbolic eating of a pomegranate; in the forms of clothing—if you are not convinced look at the folds and fall of the drapery on the Statue of Aphrodite from Cnidus, an ideal to be sure, but an indicator for the natural capacity of *peplos*, *chiton*, and *himation*—both on men and women—to capture the fluency of the body. (For that matter, of course, consider the easy friendliness of the Greek artist in portrayal of male or female {after the fifth century} nudes; the Poseidon of Sunium or the Aphrodite of Cnidus, with their gloriously frontal nudity; how florid a testimony to the ability to look the aesthetic directly in the face.)

### 2 *The social signature.*

**Social experience in ancient Athens.** One might start this rich theme with the famous Greek tragedies, which we have only touched in this culture class. Those performances, which were the chief 'recreation' of fifth century Athenians, were glorious aesthetic spectacles, music, dance, costume, and seamless verbal structures; while at the same time the outdoor theater, performed on the occasion of annual feast/festivals, was a vividly social experience, an occasion when Athenians (yes, Athenian males over the age of 18,) gathered for pleasure and fascination. The same could be said for the activities that constantly brought worshippers together in the sacred precinct of the Greek temple, where sacrifices were performed and ritual hymns sung; again an occasion of social reaffirmation, in a setting of aesthetic claim. This is not to mention the largest claim on the social time and experience of the Athenian citizen, his participation in the activities of the *polis*. We have seen that this privilege and obligation was time consuming. From youth on, while learning the poetic traditions of the city-state, reading and memorizing Homer, whose work served as a kind of literary Bible/resource text for the society, the young person passed into ephebe training, military conscription—a role which would be lifelong—and then into the series of administrative and functionary roles incumbent on the citizenry, in a life where the social demands of the *polis* were everpresent.

### 3 *The religious signature.*

**The nature of the Greek religious.** It is hard to stress enough that ancient Greek culture was saturated with religious ritual. Those of us who inhabit the Abrahamic religious traditions—or perhaps none at all—may be thrown off, here, by what seems the exterior, cult-centered procedure of Hellenic religion, in which (we may feel deep down) there is little intimate inner correlative to outside action. There is no question that the religious practice of the Greeks had much to do with ritual, and that where we see human-god interactions, as at its richest in the relation of Odysseus to Athena in Homer's *Odyssey*, the mortal worshipper adopts a crafty and even sporty dialogical relation to the 'god,' rather than an intimately worshipful one. The tales that have reached us, as 'Greek mythology,' are on the whole family stories involving conflict, turf struggles, and the odd antic, which confirm our sense that in Greek religion we are dealing, yes, with a powerful component in the society, but with a complex of attitudes which the Religions of the Book make hard for us reach. We have seen that there were strong cultic trends inside Greek religion, like the worship of Dionysus at Eleusis, which absorbed passions, salvational hopes, and collective group enthusiasms differently from the theater of the Olympians, and indeed that there were both



disbelieving, and intellectual critical, elements in the society as a whole. Once again it matters greatly, in this discussion, whether one is speaking of the late fifth century, when Socrates fell victim to a paranoid Olympian society, or of the very laissez-faire religious community of Hellenistic times, when the religious cult worlds of Asia Minor were flowing into Greece, to interpenetrate with the Olympians.

*NOTE FINAL 3000 WORD PAPER DUE THIS WEEK*

Assignment:

Samons, Loren, *The Age of Pericles* (Cambridge, 2007).

*Selected Collateral Readings: Ten Eminent Texts on Ancient Greek Culture*

Adkins, A.D.H., *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1960).

Cook, A.B., *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion* (Cambridge, 1914-1925)

Dodds, E.R., *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951).

Finley, M.I., *The World of Odysseus* (New York, 1954).

Gill, Christopher, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue* (Oxford, 1996).

Harrison, Jane, *Themis* (Oxford, 1912).

Jaeger, Werner, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (Oxford, 1939).

Nilsson, Martin, *The Mycenaean Origins of Greek Mythology* (Berkeley, 1932).

Richter, Gisela, *Archaic Greek Art against its Historical Background* (Oxford, 1949).

Stokes, Adrian, *Greek Culture and the Ego* (London, 1958).

**Week 16** Overview of Greek Culture

Final 3000 word paper