“Gods overflowed like clothes from an over-filled drawer which no one felt obliged to tidy.”

—Robert Parker, Polytheism and Society at Athens

Course Description:

In this course we will travel to Greece to survey the basic elements of ancient Greek religion, including deities, cults, sanctuaries, festivals, and votive dedications. We will examine the wide variety of pagan cults from the Bronze Age to late Antiquity; the impact of Roman conquest on Greek religion; the roots of early Christianity; and the influence of ancient pagan cults on Byzantine, Ottoman and modern Greece. We will also study the relation between cults and the state, especially Athenian democracy; the impact of cults and festivals on warfare, the economy, athletics, and literature, especially tragedy; and the role of women, and other marginalized groups, in religion.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Readings:
Before Maymester begins, read: Chapters 1-4 of Ancient Greek Religion, by Jon D. Mikalson (on reserve in Central Library), and the following entries in the Anchor Bible Dictionary: “Judaism (Greco-Roman Period)”, “Christianity (Early Social Life and Organization)”, “Christianity in Greece”. You need not bring these preliminary readings to Greece with you. Do bring with you to Greece a copy of the course packet (to be purchased from the Department of Classical Studies).

Grade Breakdown:

1) Participation (30%):
You are expected to be present, punctual, respectful, and informed for all site visits, lectures, discussions, and any other scheduled course activities. Complete the readings before the site visit or discussion to which they pertain; it is very important that you are well prepared for discussion. Please bring with you to each site the plan(s) from the course packet for that site.
2) Portfolios (40%):
You are expected to become actively engaged in the material you encounter. To this end, you will keep a daily entry in your portfolio that includes 1) detailed lecture notes from each lecture and site visit, 2) at least one detailed drawing from each site, 3) reflections, connections, questions, hypotheses, syntheses at which you arrive both individually and in conversation with your fellow scholars on this trip, 4) a section devoted to your project (see below) where you collect and organize data, as well as thoughts, questions, and conclusions, related to the material. Organization and neatness are crucial to every entry and will be taken into account in our evaluation of it. Your portfolios will be collected and evaluated three times: Friday, May 8; Saturday, May 16; and Wednesday, May 27.

3) Project and Presentation (30%):
You will be a curator of some aspect of ancient religion (agreed upon by you and me in a meeting during the first week of the course) that we encounter repeatedly on our travels. Your job will be to collect, organize, and assess relevant data for your topic as we travel, and, at the end of the course, to present your findings and conclusions to the group in a 15-minute presentation. Rehearse your presentation to make it clear and effective to the rest of us.

Suggestions for Course Projects:

These should not limit you in any way; feel free to suggest your own topics.

- location of sanctuaries (by the sea? urban / extra-urban?, etc., and why?)
- components of sanctuaries: choose a particular component and trace it through various sanctuaries (e.g., type and function of water sources at sanctuaries, temples, altars, theatres / performance spaces, boundaries / walls)
- processions (composition, path(s) they take, etc.)
- festivals in honor of the gods (what are major components of each? when are they celebrated? who attends? etc.)
- inscriptions (content, presentation, location, etc.)
- organization of human motion through sanctuary space (are there particular paths that lead the worshipper through? are there prohibitions on who can travel through certain spaces? are there exceptions to the latter for, e.g., certain festivals? etc.)
- building materials in sanctuaries (what types of materials are used for temples / churches, for enclosure walls, for altars, for treasuries, etc.? who is responsible for construction? etc.)
- gods (which god(s) are worshipped in sanctuaries? when and how is more than one god present at a sanctuary? what structures celebrate them? how are they depicted in art? etc.)
- dedications / votives in sanctuaries (what types of objects are dedicated? by whom? where are they located? etc.)
- organization of space within sanctuaries (how do buildings relate to one another and to other objects, such as dedications? etc.)