

Crime and Punishment in the Ancient World

Humanities Seminars Program, Spring 2024

Wednesdays, 10 a.m.–noon
January 24–February 28
Rubel Room, Poetry Center (1508 E Helen St)

OVERVIEW

This course explores the history of criminal justice systems in the Ancient Mediterranean through close examination of select primary sources. We shall move chronologically, geographically, and topically, treating a broad range of evidence. Of central importance to the course will be the issue of boundaries: between right and wrong, imprisonment and freedom, individual and state. The trial and execution of Socrates, justice in the World of Homer, execution by gladiator, religious frauds, comic and tragic depictions of crime, bandits, spiritual and allegorical punishment: the course encompasses it all!

READINGS

In this course, we will survey a wide range of (primarily) written sources to obtain a broad view of law and order in the ancient Mediterranean world. Among these sources are the following:

- Athenian courtroom speeches (Plato's *Apology*, selected orations of Lysias and Antiphon)
- Part of an ancient Roman novel (the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius)
- Greek tragedy (Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*) and comedy (Aristophanes' *Clouds* and *Wasps*)
- Epic poetry (Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; Hesiod's *Works and Days*; Virgil's *Aeneid*)
- Letters between a provincial governor and an emperor (Pliny's *Letters*, book 10)

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Describe the Ancient Mediterranean conception(s) of right, wrong, law, justice, crime and punishment.
- Explain how attitudes towards these same conceptions changed over time and across cultures.
- List a number of ancient authors whose works touch on the issues of crime and punishment and discuss their works.
- Highlight how religious beliefs and personal values impacted law and order in the ancient world.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND (OPTIONAL) ASSIGNMENTS

****Please note: you do not need to purchase *any* of the texts below; they will be provided by the instructor.****

Week 1 (January 24): Law and Order in the Worlds of Homer and Hesiod

- Homer, *Iliad* 1
- Homer, *Odyssey* 9
- Hesiod, *Works and Days*

Week 2 (January 31): Trials in Classical Athens

- Lysias 1 and 3
- Antiphon 1
- Plato, *Apology*
- Aristophanes, *Clouds*

Week 3 (February 7): Tragedy and Comedy on Crime and Punishment

- Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*
- Aristophanes, *Wasps*

Week 4 (February 14): Robbery, Fraud and Other Types of Lawbreaking in the Roman Empire

- Pliny, *Letters* 10 (selections)
- Lucian, *Alexander the Quack Prophet*
- Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* (selections)

Week 5 (February 21): Roman Spectacle and Death: Gladiatorial Combat and Games

- Martial, *On the Spectacles*
- Tertullian, *On the Spectacles*

Week 6 (February 28): Damned If You Do: Hell and the Afterlife in the Ancient Mediterranean (and Later)

- Homer, *Odyssey* 11
- Virgil, *Aeneid* 6
- Dante, *Inferno* cantos i–v