

## Freshman Seminar

### Aristotle's Heirs: Greek and Roman Culture in Christianity and Islam



Dioscorides, *De materia medica*  
HUAM 1960.193

Instructor: Dr. Julian Yolles  
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Spring 2018  
Thursdays, 3pm-5pm  
Boylston 237

#### Enrollment

Limited to 12.

#### Course description

Note: All readings are in translation. The course will include visits to the Harvard University Art Museums and to Houghton Library.

Who owns the Greeks and Romans? For centuries, civilizations in regions as diverse as Iraq and Iberia, northern Europe and North Africa, have laid claim to the cultural and intellectual heritage of Ancient Greece and Rome. Christians and Muslims in Baghdad, Palermo, and Toledo translated philosophical, scientific, and literary works into Arabic and Latin. Why did they devote so much time and money to studying and teaching Plato, Aristotle, and Vergil? This freshman seminar follows the story of how ancient Greek and Roman thought was transmitted and transformed in the Christian and Muslim intellectual traditions. Students will read seminal works by Plato, Augustine, al-Farabi, and Dante, and engage critically with modern depictions of the recovery of ancient thought in literature (Borges) and film (*The Name of the Rose*).

## Assignments

- *Readings*: primary (and some secondary) sources in translation, averaging 75-100pp. per week.
- *Presentation*: a short (5-10min.) oral presentation on a manuscript in Houghton or an object in the Harvard University Art Museums. If enrollment exceeds 6, students will present in pairs and submit a written document indicating each student's contribution.
- *Review Assignment*: students write a review in the style of the New York Times or Times Literary Supplement (2pp.) of one of the authors on the syllabus, providing a summary and critical evaluation of the work, and indicating relevant texts that influenced their chosen author. As part of the weekly reading assignment, students will be provided with relevant reviews to serve as models for this assignment.
- *Close Reading*: a sustained analysis of a substantial passage from a primary text (i.e., ancient or medieval) in 5-7pp. Each student is required to meet with me to discuss the assignment at least 2 weeks prior to the due date.

## Participation and Preparation

Attendance, active participation, and due preparation are crucial components of the course. All assigned readings are to be completed **prior** to the meeting of the class under which they are listed.

## Accessibility Education

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with me by the end of the second week of the term.

## Academic Dishonesty

Discussion of scholarship and sharing of sources are essential for successful academic work. You are encouraged to consult with the instructors about the written assignments for this course and to exchange ideas with your classmates. You should, however, ensure that any written work that you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing, and that it reflects **your own approach** to the topic. You must also provide full citation for any books, articles, websites, etc. that you have used in the preparation of your work. Other people's ideas and opinions must always be attributed to them. All quotation from published sources must be enclosed in quotation marks and the source must be acknowledged with a full citation. If you paraphrase a source, you must still acknowledge it by supplying a citation. **Plagiarism, whether of published sources or another student's work, will not be tolerated.** If this occurs, a grade of zero will be assigned and the case will be brought to the attention of university officials.

## Schedule of Readings

All readings may be found on the course website.

### Week 1

#### **January 25. Who Owns the Greeks and Romans?**

Clips for Discussion: Astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson explains the Arabic origins of the names of stars; Archbishop Nikodimos Daoud of Mosul regrets the Christians' role in translating Greek texts for Muslims.

In the second hour, the class will pay a brief visit to the Harvard University Art Museums and to Houghton Library, where they will be introduced to the collections.

Readings: Vergil (1<sup>st</sup> BCE), *Aeneid* VI (short selection); al-Jahiz (11<sup>th</sup> CE) on the Greeks (4pp.)

### Week 2

#### **February 1. Christianity: Philosophy or Religion?**

Readings: Justin Martyr (2<sup>nd</sup> CE), *Dialogue with Trypho* (selections); Tertullian (2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> CE), *Apologeticus* (selections)

### Week 3

#### **February 8. Should Christians Read Homer and Virgil?**

Readings: Basil of Caesarea (4<sup>th</sup> CE), *Address to Young Men on Reading Greek Literature*; Augustine, *Confessions* I (4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> CE)

### Week 4

#### **February 15. Should Muslims Engage in Philosophy?**

Readings: al-Farabi (9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> CE), *The book of letters*; Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World: A Very Short Introduction*, 1-25

### Week 5

#### **February 22. Visit to Houghton/Harvard Art Museum**

Student Presentations on Manuscripts/Objects

### Week 6

#### **March 1. Learning to Love**

Readings: Plato (5<sup>th</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> BCE), *Phaedrus* (selections); Ibn Hazm (11<sup>th</sup> CE), *The Ring of the Dove*

### Week 7

#### **March 8. All You Need is Aristotle: From al-Ghazali to Averroes**

Readings: al-Ghazali (11<sup>th</sup> CE), *The rescuer from error* (selections); "Averroes" in *The Classical Tradition*, 111-112; Borges, "Averroes's Search"

## **SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**

### Week 8

#### **March 22. How to Become a Philosopher in Medieval Spain**

Readings: Ibn Ṭufayl (12<sup>th</sup> CE), *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (selections)

*Week 9*

**March 29. Why Did English Scholars Study Arabic?**

Clips for Discussion: *Der Medicus*; *In the Name of the Rose*

Readings: Adelard of Bath (12<sup>th</sup> CE), *Natural Questions*

**Review Assignment Due.**

*Week 10*

**April 5. A Trip to the Underworld**

Readings: *Timarion* (anonymous, 12<sup>th</sup> CE?)

*Week 11*

**April 12. Classical Dialogue as Conflict Resolution**

Readings: Raimond Llull (13<sup>th</sup> CE), *The Book of the Gentile*

*Week 12*

**April 19. Dante on Greeks, Romans, and Muslims**

Readings: Dante (13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> CE), *The Divine Comedy* (selections); Nataina, "Reading One's Way to Happiness: Dante, Cicero, and the Promise of the Greeks"; Stone, "Dante and the Falasifa: Religion as Imagination"

**End of Reading Period: Close Reading Due.**

Bibliography of Secondary Literature

Adamson, P. *Philosophy in the Islamic World: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2015).

Borges, J.L. "Averroes's Search," tr. A. Hurley in *Collected Fictions* (New York, 1998).

Grafton, A., Most, G.W., Settis, S., eds. *The Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010).

Nataina, F. "Reading One's Way to Happiness: Dante, Cicero, and the Promise of the Greeks" in J.M. Ziolkowski, ed., *Dante and the Greeks* (Washington, D.C., 2014), pp. 141-162.

Stone, G.B. "Dante and the Falasifa: Religion as Imagination" in J.M. Ziolkowski, ed., *Dante and Islam* (New York, 2015), pp. 114-134.