

Written Assignments

History of Ancient Rome • Spring 2023

For this course, you'll write a researched position paper (due at the end of the semester) and an essay on images of the ancient world. In addition, you'll also turn in the write-ups of your in-class presentations and a proposal for your position paper.

Before uploading, make sure your essays meet the Requirements for All Papers. All written assignments must be submitted via BlackBoard.

Open the individual pages linked below for the details, requirements, and guidance.

	<i>Upload by</i>
Images Essay	Monday, March 6
Position Paper Proposal	Monday, March 20
Position Paper	Monday, May 8
Presentation Write-Up	1 week after presentation given

IMPORTANT

Watch the video. The overview video explains what I want you to cover in the essay and what I'm expecting in terms of arguments, evidence, and structure.

Before you upload, make sure your essay meets the Requirements for All Papers, including formatting, structure, and citations. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited. For how to do citations and bibliographies, see the Research and Citation Center.

Essay on Representations and Images

The assignment: Write a 3- to 4-page essay using depictions of the ancient Roman world to take a position on the representations of ancient cultural ideas and beliefs, following one of the following two options.

OPTION 1

Two pieces in a museum

How a culture sees abstract ideas (masculinity, virtue, old age, divinity, and so on) is often reflected in its artwork. What can two different works of art depicting the same idea, but from different times or places in the Roman world, tell us about how the cultures that produced them?

For this option, you need to choose two works of art from the ancient world that (a) represent the same idea or concept but (b) come either from different periods or from different places in the ancient Roman world.

In your essay, compare three things that these works have in common, using those comparisons to make an argument about what these two artists believed in and the insights this gives us into the times and places they came from.

Choosing your subjects

- Your two works of art must represent the same idea or concept. For example, you can choose two little girls, two warriors, two fertility goddesses, etc. The idea is to look for how similarities and differences in representations of the same idea tell us about the cultural beliefs and expectations that shaped the artists and their own culturally-conditioned visions of that idea.
- Your works of art must be from two different places or two different periods in the Roman world (before 500 CE). This allows you to talk about two separate societies and how they represent the same concepts differently. The two pieces can be in any visual medium: sculpture, painting, relief, etc. They do not have to be in the same medium as long as they are depictions of the same idea or concept.
- Ideally, you should experience the artwork face-to-face by attending a museum in person. Possible venues include: Metropolitan Museum's Greek and Roman Art Collection; and Fordham Museum of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Art. You are, of course, not limited to these venues, and you are not limited to New York. If you are not able to attend a museum in person because of ongoing restrictions, you may find imagery of artworks that meet the requirements on museum websites instead.

Writing your paper

- Choose three aspects of the works you can discuss for both pieces that seem to reflect how the artist felt about the subject and what the subject stood for.
 - Some possibilities include facial expression, dress, use of technique or medium, stiffness/fluidity, apparent strength/weakness, idealism/realism, or any other elements offering some kind of insight into what the artist was trying to convey. Describe and discuss your subjective impressions of these three aspects in the two works.
 - For each aspect, compare how it manifests in the first piece; then talk about how the second piece is similar or different and in what way; and finally talk about what these similarities or differences tell us about what each artist believed about their subject and what that might tell us about the cultural beliefs they came from in relation to the subject being depicted.

For example: say the works you've chosen are two sculptures depicting a goddess of love from different times and places, and one has a crafty expression while the other has an innocent expression. The different facial expressions can be used to talk about how each artist, and the cultures they came from, might have thought about things like the gods' attitudes toward their roles in creating relationships between mortals; the nature of love; the motivations of the gods, etc.

- Make an argument about how consistently the same core idea was seen in the two times or places that produced these two works. If art is an expression of cultural values, what do the differences between these works tell you about the respective cultures they come from? What do their similarities tell you about what these ancient cultures have in common?
- You do not need to preface your essay with background about the periods, the media used, etc. This essay is about your subjective reactions to these two specific works and what you believe they are telling you about the beliefs and social expectations of the cultures they came from.
- On a separate "Works Discussed" page after your essay:
 - List the title of each work, the artist, the approximate date it was created, the city or region it came from originally, and the name of the museum gallery where the work can be found.
 - Paste in photographs of the items. If it's permitted at the museum, take a picture of the items while you're there. If it's not, find pictures of those specific items on the museum's web site.

OPTION 2

The ancient world on film

Every depiction of an historical event, whether in prose, poetry, painting, theater, or film, involves an artist using history to convey his or her own beliefs. What do the creators of the film and the authors of the source material it was based on want you to believe?

For this option, you need to choose a film that is set in the ancient Roman world (before 500 CE) and that is based on an ancient primary source. In your essay, compare the agenda of the filmmakers with the agenda of the authors of the primary source. Describe and discuss the similarities and differences in how these creators reshaped this event for their own purposes. Use these similarities and differences to make an argument about the ways in which this particular event is leveraged to impose ideas on audiences and about what this event means to the people who create art about it.

Choosing your subjects

- First, choose and watch any feature-length film set in the ancient Roman world. You can also choose two episodes of a television series set in the Roman world.
- Then find the ancient primary source material it was based on and read it. For example, if you chose the movie *Gladiator*, which is set the reign of Commodus, the primary source you'd need would be the main ancient accounts of the life and times of Commodus. Your primary source(s) must come from the ancient world (before 500 CE).
- Some suggestions for possible films or series and their corresponding sources are below. The list is not exhaustive, and you are not limited to this list as long as the film you choose is set in the Roman world and is based on ancient primary sources.

Writing your paper

- Choose three moments or depictions from the film and find the corresponding events or depictions in the primary source.
 - For each moment or depiction, describe and discuss how it appears in the film and how it is presented similarly or differently in the primary source material.

For example: In the movie *300*, Xerxes and the Persians are depicted in a very distinctive and heavy-handed manner. If this is one of your three topics, could describe and discuss what tropes and visual and dialog cues the filmmakers were using to suggest how we should think of the Persians in the film, and why the filmmakers might have chosen to represent the Persians this way as part of their overall point about these events.

Meanwhile, Herodotos's presentation of the Persians is very different, which you can use to discuss what Herodotos wanted us to think about the Persians and the role he saw them as playing in this war.

After that, you could discuss how and why the two depictions are different and what this means for their two different perspectives on differences between Greeks and Persians.

- Use these similarities or differences to make an argument about (a) the agenda of the primary source author and how it compares to the agenda of the filmmakers, and (b) the ways this historical event is used by others to present their own ideas, and what this tells us about the shape and meaning of this event's impact and legacy on history.
 - **Please take note:** This essay is about the agenda of the primary source author as much as the filmmakers'. Do not use the source to "fact check" the film and list what it got "wrong". You must consider the primary source to be at least as skewed, manipulative, and agenda-driven as the film.
- On a separate "Works Discussed" page after your essay, list the title of film, year, director, stars and studio. Then list the book or books you drew your written evidence from, using standard citation style. The references to the primary source must also be properly cited in the text as usual.
 - Some possibilities for the film and sources option include, but are not limited to, the following. Links to most of these primary sources can be found on the ancient texts page on my website.

Position Paper Proposal

You will be writing a 6- to 8-page position paper in which you express an opinion about a topic related to Roman history, and use evidence to back up that opinion. In this paper, you're taking a side on some question or controversy, and you're using reasoning and research to support your side of the argument.

We'll work through it in stages over the course of the semester. The first stages involve choosing a topic and writing a proposal.

1. Choose a topic

First, choose one of the 13 meeting topics for the course and decide on a controversy or debate pertaining to that topic.

- You can choose something that the people at the time might have debated—e.g., “Is Greek culture degrading Roman virtue and old-fashioned values?” as a question arising in the late Republic, or a question arising among modern historians—e.g., “Did the Roman empire arise through conscious imperialism or ad hoc reactions to events?” In each case you need to outline both sides of the question in your paper and then provide evidence why you think one side was right.
- Choose a topic you're interested in and have fun with it. Make it wacky, make it provocative—anything is fine as long as you make an argument regarding your chosen topic and support it with facts.

2. Write a proposal

The assignment: The proposal is just a brief one-page preview of your position paper.

It should include:

- The topic you think you'll want to write about and the problem you're interested in addressing. You should be able to delineate the problem by describing the opposing views people might take. To make sure you have two clear opposing opinions, you might want to express them in the form “Some say... Others say...”
- Your preliminary thesis statement—in other words, what you think you might be arguing in your paper.
 - Your thesis statement, both here and in the final paper, should be a statement of opinion that someone could disagree with. It can take the form of following up the description of the opposing opinions with your own: “I believe...”
 - Remember that your thesis is provisional. You can change anything about your approach and interpretation after the proposal; in fact, uncovering information as you do your research makes refining or changing your initial assessments very likely.

Your proposal is structured like the introduction (see next page), and may serve as the basis for it.

The proposal is not graded, but whether you submitted a proposal on time will be factored into the final grade for the position paper. I will give you feedback on things like the feasibility of researching your topic, whether the scope is too big or too narrow for a paper like this, and some possible sources you might want to look at.

Note: A sample proposal can be found on the proposal page for the course website.

Note: The one-page proposal described here is what's due in Week 9.

Position Paper

The assignment: Write a 6- to 8-page position paper, due at the end of the semester, in which you express an opinion about a topic related to Roman history, and use evidence to back up that opinion. In this paper, you're taking a side on some question or controversy, and you're using reasoning and research to support your side of the argument.

3. Find your evidence

Research your topic and find at least three sources that will provide you with evidence for your argument; these need to be primary and secondary sources only (see the Research and Citation Center for more on sources). I'll point you toward some possibilities in my feedback on your proposal.

- Ideally you should have a mix of primary and secondary sources, but it will depend on the topic.
- Tertiary sources are not allowed. These include textbooks, encyclopedias, and most websites. See the Research and Citation Center for more on sources.
- For guidance on finding full-text online primary and secondary sources, see the Research and Citation Center.

4. Make your argument

- In your introduction, briefly describe the problem and state the position you will argue as a thesis statement. Your introduction should follow the format of the proposal (see the proposal page).

Sample Introduction

PROBLEM > Hannibal Barca, the great Carthaginian general, brought 37 war elephants with him over the Alps into Italy, and at the climactic Battle of Zama they had a front line that included 80 elephants. Did Hannibal's elephants really make a difference?

OPPOSING SIDES > Some say that Hannibal's elephants were crucial in establishing the morale of his troops against the legendary Roman legions and in intimidating other armies along the way into alliances; but others say that Hannibal's elephants did the Carthaginian side more harm than good in their fight with Rome. *I believe that Hannibal's use of elephants was a mistake, not because war elephants were a dumb idea in general, but because Roman adaptability meant that the Romans would inevitably find a way around them.*

THESIS >

- In the body of your paper, make three assertions as to why your thesis statement is valid. For each assertion, describe and discuss the evidence from the primary and secondary sources.

For example, if you were writing the Hannibal/elephants paper described on the proposal page, you could start one section with an assertion that elephants were not a bad idea inherently, then discuss evidence showing the effective use of elephants in war.

Then begin the next section with an assertion that Romans were adaptable in war, and discuss evidence showing how Romans changed their military tactics and strategies to meet new kinds of war and new enemies.

Your third section could begin with an assertion that it was Roman adaptability that trumped the effectiveness of Hannibal's evidence, and discuss the evidence that showed how the Romans overcame the use of elephants in the fight with Hannibal.

- Each section starts with an assertion followed by evidence, and each section builds on the previous sections to make an overall argument.
- End with a conclusion that shows how your three assertions came together to support your thesis.

Your essay must have citations for all quotes, paraphrases, and ideas from your sources. There must also be a bibliography that lists your sources. We'll talk about this in class, and see the Research and Citation Center for more.

Optional Draft. You may submit an optional draft two weeks before the final due date. It should include most of your paper (at least two thirds of the final content, with sections to be written described in square brackets). I'll give feedback, but not a grade, to help you refine your final paper. To make sure I see it soonest, please email me your optional draft rather than uploading it to BlackBoard.

Presentation Write-Up

The assignment: For each of your two presentations on sources from the assigned readings, write a 2–3 page essay that summarizes what the reading tells us.

Your write-up should do the following:

- Briefly summarize what the document says and, more importantly, analyze what the author is trying to say about the subject at hand. In other words, you need to identify and discuss what you believe is the author's interpretation, bias, and point of view and how it affected the author's treatment of the topic. Give examples from the document that illustrate your assessment of the author's spin.
- Provide perspective by relating the material in the document, and the author's bias on it, to the bigger picture—the material being discussed in class.

The main point of the presentation and the write-up is NOT to summarize the reading. Summary should be less than 25% of your presentation and your write-up. The main point is to analyze the reading and talk about what it means and what it tells us about that place and time in ancient history.

Your write-up needs to be posted to BlackBoard before the next class meeting after you present in class. In this final version of the write-up you can incorporate ideas and reactions that came up during the in-class discussion that followed the presentation.