UW in Florence
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Course Descriptions

THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD
UW Equivalent: History 110

The Ancient Mediterranean World refers to all the civilizations originating in the area bordering on the Mediterranean Sea: Mesopotamia; Egypt; Anatolia (modern Turkey); Greece; Rome. This course will introduce students to the history and the culture of this area from the rise of civilization in Mesopotamia and Egypt (ca. 3000 BCE) to the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West (476 CE). The focus will be on the political, socio-economic and cultural developments. After completing this course you will have become more familiar with issues such as: why did civilization start in Mesopotamia where agriculture was only made possible because of the use of irrigation?; how and why was democracy invented in Athens?; how did Rome create an empire spanning all the lands between England in the West and Mesopotamia in the Middle East?; why was Julius Caesar murdered?; why did the Roman Empire fall?

EXPLORATIONS IN EUROPEAN HISTORY: ROMAN WOMEN (AND MEN)
UW Equivalent: History 223

The legal sources from ancient Rome suggest to the modern reader that the position of women in society was marginal. Women were regarded as lifelong minors who required a male guardian in order to be represented in court or to engage in financial transactions. Based on legal texts it is not difficult to conclude that women had fewer opportunities to develop or display their talents and that their role was more or less restricted to the home. A few upper-class women did hold public office, but these were mainly restricted to religion. However, this is not the whole story. The law generally prescribes how people should behave, but in the real world decisions were sometimes made that avoided or sidestepped the law, without overtly breaking it. In other words, the general picture of women in Roman society is not as negative as the legal sources suggest (although it is not possible to escape the notion that overall women were more marginal than men).

This course will examine the main social environments which are of importance to the lives of women. We will study to what degree the position of women was anchored in, and controlled by, the world of their male relatives and to what degree women could and did choose to ignore the rules that were imposed on them. Did women choose their own marriage partners, were they able to initiate a divorce, and to what degree was their sexual behavior policed by their male relatives? In order to answer these questions successfully the course will pay close attention to the interpretation of sources, whether they are of a literary, legal or documentary kind. The key problem is that the majority of the sources which survive from the Roman world were written by and for men. The course will demonstrate methods and ways in which male-authored evidence can be used to reconstruct the lives and experiences of women.