Greek and Roman Civilization
Module GC307 (Autumn repeat 2019)

Strange Creatures: Anthropology in Antiquity

Deadline for submissions: Friday, 9 August 2019 by 5pm

TWO COPIES of each essay are to be submitted with cover sheets to the Department Office

NOTE: This module will be assessed by two pieces of written work.
N.B. there will be no exam.

FIRST WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

Length: c. 2,000 words (40% of marks for the module):

Survey the types of noble savages found in ancient sources. What are their distinctive characteristics, and how would they have resonated with an ancient audience?

Source material: A. O. Lovejoy and G. Boas, Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity, chapter 11, ‘The Noble Savage in Antiquity’, sources quoted in the lecture notes, and any other relevant ancient sources (sculpture, vase paintings etc.).

Suggested Bibliography

Works highlighted in bold are the most accessible or directly useful.


Gruen, E., 2010, Rethinking the Other in Antiquity, Princeton.
On how the old ‘description of the Other by contrasts’ tradition of scholarship needs to be updated to ‘description by contrasts and parallels’.

A useful collection of essays by Hartog. An easier read than *The Mirror of Herodotus*.


A very accessible and stimulating book on how everything weird and wonderful ends up at the edges of the ancient world, or, rather, how the margins create weirdness.


On the early tradition of Greek ethnography before the Persian Wars.

SECOND WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

Deadline: Friday, 9 August 2019 at 5pm

**TWO COPIES** of each essay are to be submitted with **cover sheets** to the Department Office

**Length**: c. 3,000 words (60% of marks for the module):

Either

‘For Lucretius, cities were simply a mistake in human cultural evolution.’ To what degree, if at all, do you agree with this judgement of Lucretius’ attitude in his account of prehistory in book 5 of *On the Nature of the Universe*?

Or

‘Good morality is more effective in Germany than good laws are elsewhere.’ (Tacitus, *Germania*, 19). Discuss the ways in which Tacitus’ concerns about Roman society colour his account of the Germans in the *Germania*.  

p.t.o
Or

Discuss whether the Tupinamba are more than simply noble savage stereotypes in Jean De Léry’s History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil.

Suggested Bibliographies
Works highlighted in bold are the most accessible or directly useful.

Lucretius

A good survey of Epicurean attitudes.

A speculative paper using game theory to understand the basis of Epicurean justice. Focuses mainly on the first village societies in 5.1011-27.

A detailed line by line commentary on the first part of Lucretius’ prehistory, with introductions to each section.

A survey chapter including a section on Lucretius’ prehistory.


Mainly on the first village societies in Lucretius (5.1011-27), and the role of women and children in human cultural evolution.


Argues that Lucretius’ account of the rise of cities is orthodox Epicurean doctrine and need not be read as referencing contemporary Roman events or history. An interesting view but based on very little evidence.

An interesting take on Roman influences in Lucretius’ account of the rise of cities in book five. Differs from me in seeing early kingship as an Epicurean political ideal, where I see it as the first step on the slippery slope to moral and societal disaster.

Tacitus


Especially chapter 2, ‘The “Other” and the other “Other”’, on the ethnographic tradition and Caesar’s portrayal of the Gauls and Germans, and chapter 4, ‘Alien Nation’.

Translation with very good introduction and detailed commentary on the Germania. Strongly recommended.

A very accessible and stimulating book on how everything weird and wonderful ends up at the edges of the ancient world, or, rather, how the margins create weirdness.


On the interaction of ethnography and politics and of how characterization of barbarians aids the imperial project.

De Léry

A stimulating study of renaissance responses to the New World.

On the realities of the disastrous French colony set up by Villegagnon and its collapse.

On the influence of de Léry on contemporary and later anthropology.

— 1997, Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne, Berkeley.
A stimulating survey of responses to cannibalism in literature. How to explain the civility of peoples who commit this most uncivil of acts?


An interesting study of food in de Léry’s account. Should their practice of cannibalism be included under the heading of food in a study of the Tupinamba? Is eating people wrong? Not necessarily.

A useful brief essay, explaining the background to the expedition and looking at how de Léry’s account rises above the more usual imprinting of European ideas onto the ‘tabula rasa’ of New World peoples.

A very useful edition with translation, a good introduction to De Léry, the expedition, the cultural background, and a useful commentary.