

## *M.A. Greek Literature/History Questions*

1. Discuss the formulation of the Homeric question, in particular the consequences of the stress laid upon that question in the contemporary study of Homer's poetry. What view do you take of Gregory Nagy's regard of Homer as "a carefully developed multiple exposure...of a fluctuating poetic organism that still kept [his] own unique identity so as to be recognized by all who knew and heard [him]"?
2. It is abundantly clear that Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides make considerable use of the Epic Cycle. Discuss their adaptation of epic and sub-epic material to the Attic stage. How—and why—does each differ in his manner of adaptation?
3. How should the apparent exoteric and literary nature of Plato's dialogs affect our appreciation of both the philosophy and the prose artistry of the works? To what extent are the dialogs intended to be reflections of an esoteric teaching?
4. Athenian democracy has been described as a "performative culture." What civic institutions and literary forms encapsulate the performativity that defined classical Athens?
5. The commingling of the Greek and Roman cultures was perennially unsettled: Greeks tended to resent Roman power, while Romans, despite a deep respect for Greek culture, generally distrusted the Greek character. Discuss the history of the cultural encounter between Greece and Rome from its beginnings to the reign of Diocletian.
6. Compare the literary, especially the narrative, qualities of the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides (plot, characters, theme, tone, voice). How do these qualities enhance the works' power to inform and convince their audience (of listeners or readers)?
7. Discuss the emergence of sophistry and rhetoric as a potent political and philosophical force in the 5th-3rd centuries B.C. Who are the crucial figures in the evolution of rhetoric, and what is their relationship to one another?
8. Classical literature, far more explicitly than much later Western literature until the nineteenth century, virtually begs us to ask questions about gender. Plato and Aristotle confronted such issues directly. Most Greek comedies and tragedies commonly taught put gender conflict at the heart of the plot and allow their female characters to challenge male authority and assumptions... As male-generated texts, these works reflect anxieties and concerns that were of greatest significance to them. (Helene Foley)  
Does Greek literature seem to you to be as charged with gender conflict as Foley believes it to be? Feel free to agree or to disagree with her, but be certain to buttress your arguments with specific references to texts, art, and architecture.
9. Some scholars have taken up the cause of (re)establishing the literary legitimacy of the cento, a form that, until fairly recently, had been generally regarded as (at best) a kind of

modestly witty parlor game. For example, M. Usher finds in the recasting of strands of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* into the Gospel story—an effort that, as late as 1960, one noteworthy German scholar had dismissed as worth neither being printed nor read—a rebirth of the rhapsodic tradition. Indeed, Usher claims that Eudocia succeeded in producing

a *parole* re-generation of Homer within the larger context of late antique aesthetics, where, in the words of one of its finest exponents, "fragments of earlier poets, invested with brilliance and color by their original context, are manipulated and juxtaposed in striking new combinations, often exploiting the contrast with the previous text in sense, situation, and setting."

Having first addressed broadly the provenance and the evolution of the Homeric texts and the enormity of the influence of Homer on earlier Greek literature, consider the legitimacy of the effort to (re)legitimate the Homeric cento. You may wish to consider, for example, if there are any limits that one should impose upon the term "rhapsodic."

10. How can material and documentary sources supplement our meager and often tendentious evidence for studying women's lives in the ancient Greek world? What distortions might the use of such sources avoid and/or introduce into this subject?
11. What are the major factors that explain the rise of the polis as a distinctive form of social organization?
12. How important a role did Alexander's conquests play in the cultural exchange between the Greek-speaking world and its "near eastern" neighbors? (To answer this question you should also discuss the main vehicles for cultural exchange before 330 B.C.)

The following two questions are intended for Mellon-Helis Fellows who are enrolled in the M.A.-Ph.D. program of the Department of Greek and Latin and who began their studies in or after the Fall semester, 2005-2006:

13. "When Lucian makes brief allusion to Christ in connexion with his own enemy Peregrinus, he describes the subject of Christian worship as a crucified sophist. The term in context is clearly meant disparagingly, but it is easy enough to see how it could be applied in a neutral or even complimentary way: Jesus Christ after all was during his lifetime a popular public speaker with an inner circle of disciples. And if Christ could be perceived as a sophist, then the tools of sophistic could be all the more readily rendered accessible to Christians" (G. Anderson, *The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire*, pp. 205-6). To what extent could Christian intellectuals of the third and fourth centuries be considered practitioners and heirs of the set of rhetorical and cultural practices known as the Second Sophistic?
14. In an important review of Robin Lane Fox's *Pagans and Christians* (*The New York Review of Books*, March 12, 1987, pp. 24-27), Peter Brown criticizes the author (and the

discipline of ancient history in general) for missing the “symbolic system,” the “richness,” and the “passion” that characterized early Christian texts, ideas, and experiences. In your opinion, has the study of early Christianity in the two decades since the publication of *Pagans and Christians* continued to move along the parallel tracks represented by the approaches of Lane Fox and Brown, or has there been a convergence of purposes and methods?