



CLAS-HIST 330 The Roman Empire: Baths, Wine & Sex

Course Syllabus Fall Semester 2026

Instructor: Prof. Giampiero Bevagna

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: None

Class Hours: 45

Class Meeting Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Office Hours: by appointment after a class or via Zoom (see Moodle site)

Course Type: Standard Course

Lab Fee: USD\$295

Course Description

How did average citizens of a town in the Roman Empire live? What were their daily habits, duties and pleasures? We will try to understand what was the system of beliefs and values that guided daily life. To do this, we will focus on a more specific aspect of the life of ancient Romans: what made their life enjoyable.

In order to answer such questions, we will follow the life of ordinary citizens in Pompeii, an ordinary city on the shores of the Mediterranean in Roman Italy during the first century CE.

Famous for being destroyed by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE and uniquely preserved under feet of hardened lava, Pompeii and the neighboring towns are now one of the most important archaeological sites in the world. Since their "rediscovery" in the 1700s, these cities have yielded tons of immensely valuable archaeological material: from remains of charred food to impressive ruins of public buildings; from written graffiti on the walls to rich art collections in individual houses. With all categories of material culture, Pompeii can provide us with an insight into social, political, religious, and commercial life in the ancient Roman world.

By tracing the footsteps of these people, we will explore the streets, homes, shops and public buildings of Pompeii. Through the things they left behind, we will learn about everyday life in the context of the ancient Roman world in general. Pompeii will serve as a microcosm for studying Roman society and culture. The overarching goal is to integrate archaeological, art historical, and primary literary material into a single, coherent intellectual narrative in order to gain a complex understanding of Roman Civilization at its height. In the end, the goal is to "look at the Romans through the eyes of the Romans."

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- *list* the major events in the history of ancient Rome;
- *analyze* both primary and secondary sources and to examine how authors of different time periods and social backgrounds present key issues;
- *summarize* the relevance of the use of material remains (archaeological record) in learning about Roman culture; and

- *synthesize* the various ways that Roman civilization influenced their culture, and, more generally, the development of world history in a coherent oral report.

Course Materials

Readings

PDFs of the readings are available on Umbra's Moodle site. Additional hand-outs will be provided in classes when needed.

Assessments

Attendance	10%
Mid-term Exam	25%
Final Exam	25%
Analysis of Documentaries	20%
Quizzes	20%

Grading

Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A A-	93% - 100% 90% - 92%	Exceptional Excellent
B+ B B-	87% - 89% 83% - 86% 80% - 82%	Superior
C+ C C-	77% - 79% 73% - 76% 70% - 72%	Satisfactory
D+ D D-	67% - 69% 63% - 66% 60% - 62%	Low Pass
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Please note: decimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

Course Requirements

Grades are based on:

Attendance (10%)

Attendance is an essential part of this course. If you attend all the meetings, you will receive 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

Reading Quizzes (20%)

Starting on week 3, every other week there will be a short quiz with content questions about the weekly reading assignment to help students zoom in on the most important ideas.

Exam 1: Midterm (25%)

Items covered on each exam include lectures and readings (on the subjects discussed after the previous exam). Testing format will be multiple choice, T/F questions, map - glossary – chronology quizzes, short answer questions and short essays. Study guides will be distributed in advance. See the full prompt in Moodle.

Exam 2: Final (25%)

Items covered on each exam include lectures and readings (on the subjects discussed after the previous exam). Testing format will be multiple choice, T/F questions, map - glossary – chronology quizzes, short answer questions and short essays. Study guides will be distributed in advance. See the full prompt in Moodle.

Analysis of Documentaries (20%)

Students will write a report/analysis of a documentary on Roman Civilization or Pompeii. See the full prompt on Moodle for more instructions.

Course Content Disclaimer

Some ancient art shows scenes of sexual intercourse or violent images.

Additional Course Information

Class sessions will be based on students **having read** the assigned material for class, either from primary sources (what the Romans themselves wrote) or from secondary sources (what moderns have written about the Romans). Classes will be a combination of discussion and lecture, leaning more heavily to discussion when the readings are primary sources.

Sometimes, I will provide open-ended discussion questions before the class meeting. I hope the entire class will prepare answers to the discussion questions and be ready to discuss their answers during class. It is therefore important for everyone to consider the readings carefully, to put some thought into the questions, and to prepare preliminary answers before coming to class.

During class sessions we will study important examples of Roman monuments and pieces of art. These examples will help students to understand and visualize better the fundamental aspects of Roman history and culture. Students are expected to pay great attention to these examples to be able to interpret images of Roman civilization and provide an informed, detailed discussion. Lectures will include material beyond the course readings for which students will be held responsible in the midterm and final exams. Therefore, it is critical for students to take notes, and class attendance is required.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. The first two absences per course due to illness will be considered excused “sick days” and do not require medical documentation. To receive additional excused absences due to illness, students are required to see a local physician or request a letter from an Institute-approved doctor documenting they should be excused from class for illness.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student’s academic performance and will result in a reduction of the student’s final course grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower the students’ grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness include death in the immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, and medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled.

Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director, but only if a medical certification is provided.

Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute’s Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are

enrolled in.

Tardiness Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes punctually. Any student arriving up to 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as tardy. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. However, should a student arrive more than 15 minutes late or depart more than 15 minutes before the conclusion of the class, it will be recorded as an absence.

Students are also expected to remain in class during the time of instruction except for a reasonable amount of time to use the restroom. Students who leave class and do not return during the class session will receive an unexcused absence or late penalty.

Academic Integrity

All forms of **cheating** (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and **plagiarism** (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Utilizing ChatGPT or other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for the generation of content submitted by a student as their own as part of any assignment for academic credit at the Institute constitutes a form of plagiarism.

Should the Institute become aware of a student's use of such platforms and services, the student will be subject to the same consequences and judicial proceedings as are in place for plagiarism (defined above).

Classroom & Laptop Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be set on silent mode before the beginning of each class. Computers and other electronic devices cannot be used during class lectures and discussions, unless there has been a specific academic accommodation.

I as an instructor and as a person am dependent on both my computer and my telephone. That said: An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, I have a physical notebook policy: I ask you to leave your computers in your bags and phones in your pockets and use a regular notebook. There are four exceptions: 1) if you have an accommodation related to your vision; 2) if you are using a tablet to take notes, one which is not connected to the internet; 3) if we have an in-class tutorial about online research tools; 4) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer.

As for all policies, exceptions can be made by the Director for students with special accommodations or in case of medical emergencies, etc.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1

DAY 1: Introduction to the Course

DAY 2: What is the Roman Empire?

WEEK 2

DAY 2: What is the Roman Empire?

Reading #1:

- a) M. Ward, F. M. Heichelheim, C. A. Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*. 6th ed., (Prentice Hall 2016) 1-3, 7-9
- b) L. Adkins, R.A. Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome* (Facts On File 2004) 110-115, (115-119)

DAY 2: Who are the Romans?

Reading #2:

M. Ward, F. M. Heichelheim, C. A. Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*. 6th ed., (Prentice Hall 2016) 40-48

WEEK 3

DAY 1: Roman Society

Reading #3:

B. Campbell, *The Romans and their World. A Short Introduction* (Yale University Press 2012) 167-178

DAY 2: Roman Society

Reading #4:

B. Campbell, *The Romans and their World. A Short Introduction* (Yale University Press 2012) 182-186

Activity: Quiz #1

WEEK 4

DAY 1: Reckoning Time in Rome

Reading #5:

L. Adkins, R.A. Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome* (Facts On File 2004) 374-375, 314-320

DAY 2: Roman Religion

Reading #6:

L. Adkins, R.A. Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome* (Facts On File 2004) 274-275, 277, 307-314

WEEK 5

DAY 1: The Roman House. Domus & Villa.

Reading #7:

J. Berry, *The Complete Pompeii*, (Thames & Hudson 2007) 88-91

DAY 2: The Roman House. Domus & Villa.

Reading #8:

J. Berry, *The Complete Pompeii*, (Thames & Hudson 2007) 88-91

Activity: Quiz #2

WEEK 6

REVIEW

MIDTERM EXAM

SEMESTER BREAK

WEEK 7

DAY 1: Pompeii And Herculaneum: Urban Layout.

Reading #9:

P. Wilkinson, *Pompeii. An Archaeological Guide* (I.B. Tauris 2017) 64-71

DAY 2: Politics. The Forum Of Pompeii.

Reading #10:

- a) M. Beard, *Pompeii, The Life of a Roman Town* (Profile Books 2010) 188-215
- b) P. Wilkinson, *Pompeii. An Archaeological Guide* (I.B. Tauris 2017) 98-101
- b) J. Berry, *The Complete Pompeii*, (Thames & Hudson 2007) 128-133

WEEK 8

DAY 1: Spectacles And Entertainments: Theatre.

Reading #11:

- a) M. Beard, *Pompeii, The Life of a Roman Town* (Profile Books 2010) 253-275
- b) C. Parslow, "Entertainment at Pompeii," in J. J. Dobbins, P. W. Foss, eds., *The World of Pompeii* (Routledge 2007) 212-223

DAY 2: Spectacles And Entertainments: Gladiatorial Combats.

Reading #12:

J. Berry, *The Complete Pompeii* (Thames & Hudson 2007) 134-148

Activity: Quiz #3

FRIDAY-SUNDAY, NOV. 20-22: FIELDTRIP TO POMPEII

WEEK 9

DAY 1: Roman Baths

Reading #13:

- a) G. G. Fagan, "Leisure," in D. S. Potter, ed., *A Companion to the Roman Empire* (Blackwell 2006) 369-384
- b) P. Wilkinson, *Pompeii. An Archaeological Guide* (I.B. Tauris 2017) 118-125, 139, 143-148

DAY 2: Work on the documentaries

WEEK 10

DAY 1: Food & Banqueting

Reading #14:

M. Beard, *Pompeii, The Life of a Roman Town* (Profile Books 2010) 216-233

DAY 2: Food & Banqueting

Reading #15:

- a) J. Donahue, *Food and Drink in Antiquity. A Sourcebook* (Bloomsbury 2015) 157-196 *passim*
- b) K. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet* (Cambridge UP 2002) 64-72, 89-99

Activity: Quiz #4

WEEK 11

DAY 1: Sex and Gender

Reading #17:

R. Laurence, *Roman Passions*, (Continuum 2009) 75-86

DAY 2: Sex and Gender

Reading #18:

M. Beard, *Pompeii, The Life of a Roman Town* (Profile Books 2010) 233-240

WEEK 12

DAY 1: Life and Death. Pompeii and Herculaneum (documentary)

Reading #19:

J. Berry, *The Complete Pompeii*, (Thames & Hudson 2007) 18-34

DAY 2: **Final review**

WEEK 13

DAY 1: **Final exam** (during regular class time)

Bibliography

- C. S. Mackay, *Ancient Rome. A military and political History*, (Cambridge UP 2004)
- D. S. Potter, ed., *A companion to the Roman Empire* (Blackwell 2006)
- J. Berry, *The Complete Pompeii* (Thames & Hudson 2007)
- J. J. Dobbins, P. W. Foss, eds., *The World of Pompeii* (Routledge 2007)
- L. Adkins, R.A. Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome*, updated ed., (Facts On File 2004)
- M. Beard, *Pompeii. The Life of a Roman Town* (Profile Books 2010)
- M. T. Boatwright, D. J. Gargola, N. Lenski, *A Brief History of the Romans* (Oxford UP 2013)
- M. Ward, F. M. Heichelheim, C. A. Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*. 6th ed., (Prentice Hall 2016)
- B. Rawson, ed., *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Wiley-Blackwell 2011)
- M. Beard, *SPQR. A History of Ancient Rome* (Profile Books 2015)
- B. Campbell, *The Romans and their World. A Short Introduction* (Yale University Press 2012)
- P. Wilkinson, *Pompeii. An Archaeological Guide* (I.B. Tauris 2017)
- D. S. Potter, *Rome in the Ancient World* (Thames & Hudson 2018)