Preliminary Syllabus

FRSEM-UA
Travel and Communication in the Ancient World
Fall 2019
Silver 503A

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Office Hours: 1 hour to be decided together and several hours by appointment

TEXTS (ordered at the NYU Bookstore)
I placed in NYUClasses a copy of F. Redmond, *True History Decrypted*, that is the full text and commentary of Lucian’s *True History*; Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, and several other texts and articles.

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd). Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

COURSE Description

This course will enquire about the conditions for traveling and communicating in ancient times. The ancients embarked on tremendous journeys of mythic and epic significance and did not consider travel for leisure. They journeyed to distant places in precarious condition. In the modern world travels are routine and, in most cases, happen for personal entertainment or for business. Now we avidly communicate with each other in several ways and at leisure, whereas sending letters and messages in the Greek and Roman worlds was cumbersome and required time. It will be interesting to compare our ways to travel and communicate with the ancient ones. While recognizing the objective difficulties the ancients had to overcome, the students will gradually realize the dangers of a common misconception that can be called ‘the progressive model.’ The lack of
appropriate technology, electronic methods, and modern equipment did not prevent people from travelling and getting in touch with each other.

We will read parts of Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* and look through depictions of ancient rafts and ships. During the course, students will read a few books from Homer’s *Odyssey* and from Herodotus’ *Histories*, passages from Plato regarding the travelling of teachers and from Pausanias and his travel through Greece. They will read *A True History* by the second-century writer Lucian, a very amusing fictional travel and some books from Jonathan Swift prose satire *Gulliver’s Travels*. They will learn about the traveling of students to various distant schools (equivalent to modern colleges) which appears from ancient letters. Since the instructor is a cultural historian and a papyrologist, students will learn how to handle papyri (the scrolls from Egypt) in translation and will cover issues of writing and sending real letters. The papyri from Greek and Roman Egypt contain very interesting letters of students and of women. We will go through a selection of these to understand the difference from fictional writing (of which we will read samples) and everyday correspondence in antiquity.

Since most students will not be familiar with the classical world, I will show maps and videos on excavations and traveling. The course will not embrace only the evidence from the classical world. If there are in class students from other country, for example China or India, they will have a chance to research travel in their countries in antiquity and to present travel fiction there. There is also a great data base in the library on travel writing that contains diaries from travelers in the 19th and late 20th centuries. This will be an ideal source for research and oral presentation.

Attendance is mandatory and more than 2 absences will affect grades. Absences will need to be justified. There will not be exams but oral presentations, some brief written assignments, and a longer final paper. In order to make sure that students do the reading I will give occasional quizzes without announcing them. Writing counts for 60% of the final grade: 20% for all the short papers, and 40% for the final paper; 20% for quizzes and participation; and 20% for oral presentations. Everyone will be responsible for an accomplished oral presentation with handouts for everyone.
1 Preliminary assessment. Characteristics of ancient travel and formulation of the question: was travelling in antiquity severely impaired by the conditions? Geography of ancient travel: I will introduce the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.


3 Read Homer *Odyssey* 10, 11, and 12 (about 40 pages in various editions). Read the article on Telemachus’ travels (pp. 129-37) and the article on Hybris.
Hand in the first written assignment on travel in the *Odyssey* [5 pages line space 2: “Do you consider Odysseus a hero? Why did Homer portray him this way?”]. Read online on Phoenicians’ ancient ships: [http://www.phoenician.org/ancient_ships.htm](http://www.phoenician.org/ancient_ships.htm) and start looking at Casson’s *Ships and Seamanship* (do 50 pages and 50 more pages for next class).

4 I will show a video on Underwater Archaeology that will focus on ancient Greek and Roman ships and treasures found there. Travel by land and sea. Herodotus, a writer of travels. Read his accounts of Egypt in NYUClasses: *Histories* 2.35-93 (pp. 1-21).
Also, look through the many images of ancient ships in Casson’s *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (NYUClasses, 50 more pages) and comment on those you find most inspiring. Read in NYUC the article of J. Redfield “Herodotus the Tourist,” pp. 97-118. [There are in NYUC two articles on the construction of Odysseus’ boat. Two students will present them]
5 Travelling to lecture and teach, mobility of professionals: Read the beginning of Plato’s *Protagoras* in NYUClasses, pp. 1-25. Read the article of S. Montiglio, “Wandering Philosophers in Classical Greece,” pp. 86-105. Read online in Bobst NYU Hebrary the introduction (pp. 1-9) and chapter “Ships and Sails” pp. 106-25 of the book by James Beresford *The Ancient Sailing Season* (Leiden 2013). Two students will present in class and discuss his argument.


9 Play around with the fabulous Roman Peutinger. There is a copy in NYUC but also look online and bring to class your written observations. Was that a useful map? Read Casson part 2: pp. 149-228.

10 Travel as fiction: Gulliver’s travels, 54 pages. Written assignment: “Gulliver’s travel, Lucian, and Homer: Do they have things in common? [paper of 4 pages]. Oral
presentations. Introduction in class about letters in antiquity: how were they written and sent. Read in NYUC my piece “Delivery of Letters” (7 pages).

11 Read Casson pp. 229-61. Going to school in the Greek and Roman worlds: the curriculum. Letters regarding students in rhetorical school. Traveling for Study. Read the article of Scott Bradbury in NYUClasses (pp. 72-80). Read (very slowly, they are difficult) in NYUC a selection of fourth century AD letters of the professor of rhetoric Libanius concerning students in rhetorical schools (i.e. modern college, 10 pages). Read also my account of his life (8 pp.) Oral presentation on p. 1-12 of R. Criboire The School of Libanius (online in Bobst).

I will give you possible titles for your paper and you should start thinking about it. Possible titles: “Traveling with Odysseus” or “Write about the various functions of correspondence in antiquity using the sources we covered” or “What is the basic difference between ancient actual and fictional correspondence” or “Traveling then and now: did people in antiquity travel in spite of difficulties?”

The paper will include 7 pages + bibliography (I will explain you how to do).

Letters of women. Read in NYUC: Women’s letters (pp. 1-20) and Women’s
Letters handout (5 pages). Read Aristaenetus Erotic Letters (20 pp.) and compare them
with the women’s letters that you just read. Write down a love letter imitating the ancient
ones [1 page]. Read in NYUC some articles about 5 pages each: “the death of letter
writing”; “Quit Social Media”; “What is lost as handwriting fades.” Work on your paper.
Hand in your paper and give a brief presentation of it.

Raffaella Cribiore is a professor in the Department of Classics. She has written several
books on ancient education, rhetoric, and correspondence in the Greek and Roman world.
Among her books are Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt (Atlanta
1996); Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt
(Princeton 2001); The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch (Princeton 2007);
Women’s Letters from Ancient Egypt 300 BC-AD 800 (Ann Arbor) 2006; Libanius the
Sophist: Rhetoric, Reality and Religion in the Fourth Century (Ithaca 2013); Between
City and School: Selected Orations of Libanius TTH 65 (Liverpool 2016) and others.
Cribiore is a papyrologist and works on Greek papyri from Egypt. She also participates
yearly in an excavation in an Oasis in southern Egypt.