

Save Ancient Studies in America

Summer 2020 Texts-in-Translation Reading Group

Roots, Seeds, and Trees:

The Genealogies of Modern Racism & Ethnocentrism in Ancient Greece & Rome

Recent protests about racial inequality in the United States highlight the persistence and relevance of racialized ideas in our world. So, where do our concepts of race and ethnicity come from? In order to try to change how we treat each other, to fully recognize that all people are immeasurably valuable, it is important to think about how we came to be this way. Studies of the ancient world have shown that the modern notions of race and ethnicity have roots in the ancient Mediterranean basin. In this reading group, we will take on this essential task and reflect on ancient ideas of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, to see how they have influenced the modern world. Through weekly discussions of ancient textual and material sources, we will question the ways in which ancient authors and peoples described, categorized, and labeled “the Other” through genetic, environmental, and cultural conceptions of difference. The application of racial ideas in ancient contexts has become a battleground for modern culture wars. For example, white nationalist groups have appropriated the writings of ancient authors to promote a “whitewashed” picture of the ancient Mediterranean. This further raises the importance of gaining a well-founded, balanced grasp of ancient writings on race and ethnicity. Participants in this reading group will leave with a greater understanding of the diversity of the ancient Mediterranean as well as the ancient antecedents of modern racism and ethnocentrism.

Tuesdays, 4pm EST

Reading Group Facilitator:

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Reading Schedule

Week 1 - June 16th (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87269991137>)

Topic: Introductions; The “Other”

Reading:

[The Land of the Cyclopes](#) - Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.105-139, 171-298

[Fleeing Rome](#) - Juvenal, *Satire III*, 1-125

Week 2 - June 23rd (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83458415146>)

Topic: Environmental Theories

Reading:

Hippocratic Corpus, *On Airs Waters, Places*, 12-24 (pick either of two 19th century translations; one by [Francis Adams](#) and one by [W.H.S. Jones](#))

Herodotus, [Histories](#), 9.122

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1327b
Cicero, *On Divination*, 2.96-97
Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, 6.1.3-5, 6.1.8-11
Ptolemy, *Tertrabiblos*, 2.2
Vegetius, *On Military Matters*, 1.2 (“On the Selection of Recruits”)

Week 3 - June 30th (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84045306921>)

Topic: Genetic Theories and Autochthony

Reading:

“Races of Man” - Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 109-181
Athenian Citizenship Law of 451 BC - Plutarch, *Life of Pericles*, 37.1-5 (also ps.-Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians*, 26.3)
Arcadian autochthony - Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 7.1.23-27
Autochthonous Romans? - Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 1.9-11
Germans - Tacitus, *Germania*, 2, 4

Week 4 - July 7th

Topic: Cultural Theories and Ethnography

Reading:

τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν (the “Greek thing”) - Herodotus, *Histories*, 8.144
Paideia - Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, 47-50
Macedonians at the Boundaries of of Greekness - Herodotus, *Histories*, 5.22; Demosthenes, *Third Philippic*, 30-42; Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 45, 47.3-4, 71.1-3, 74.1
Ethnography of North Africa - Sallust, *The Jugurthine War*, 17-19
Ethnography of the Jews - Tacitus, *The Histories*, 5.2-8

Week 5 - July 14th

Topic: The Inhabited World (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89275035222>)

Reading:

The *Oikoumene* - Strabo, *Geography*, 1.1 (1st cent. BC Roman geographer; sections 1-3, 10-13, 16-20, and 22-23 are the most important)
The *Periplus* of Hanno (a description of a Carthaginian admiral’s journey to western Africa; c. 4th cent. BC)
Pomponius Mela - *Description of the World*, 1.1-22 (1st cent. BC Roman geographer)
Optional: Pseudo-Scymnus, *The Circuit of the Earth* (to skip the intro, start at § 61) (c. 2nd or 1st cent. BC Greek geographer)

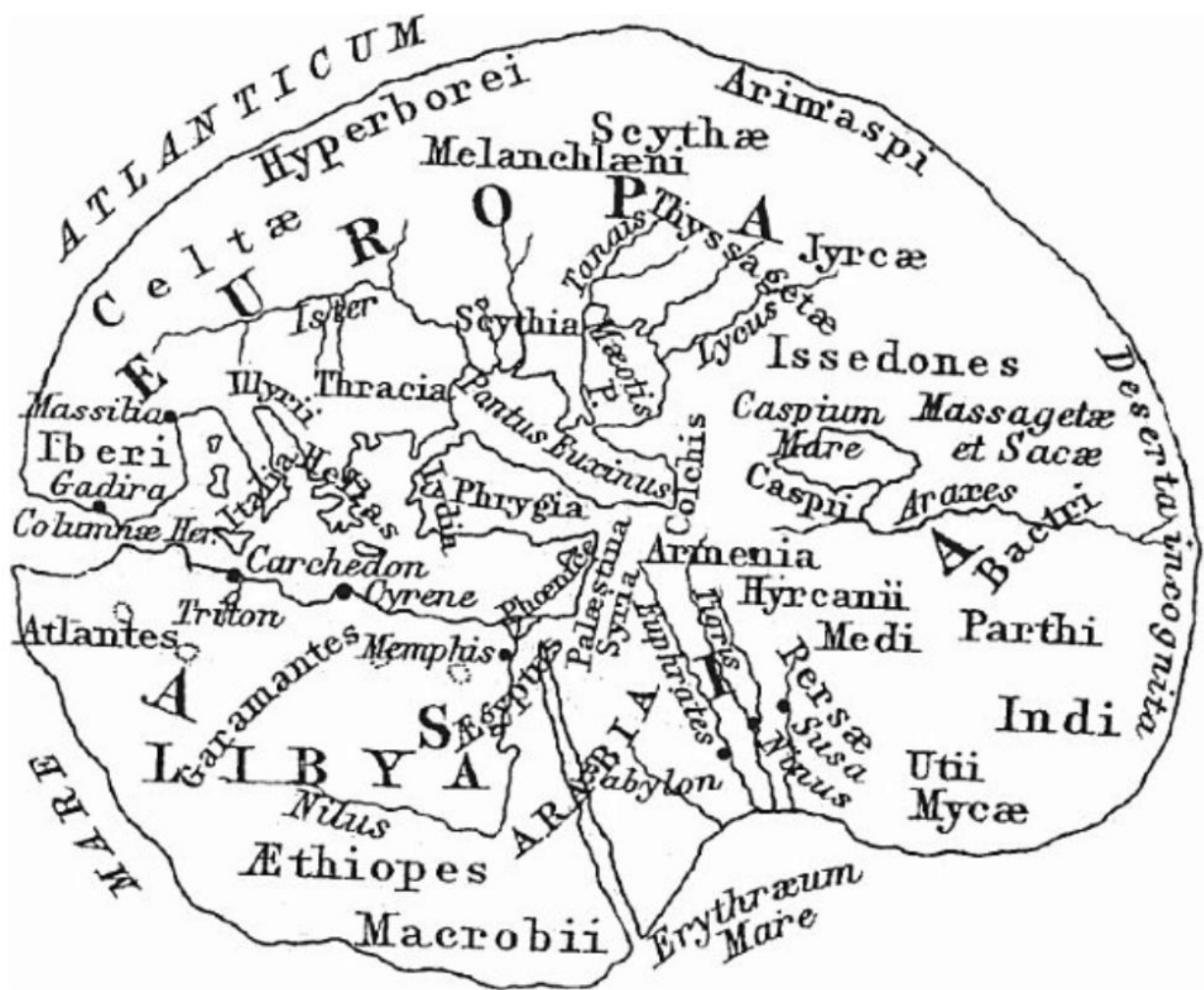
From last week (we’ll find time to discuss these as well):

Ethnography of North Africa - Sallust, *The Jugurthine War*, 17-19
Ethnography of the Jews - Tacitus, *The Histories*, 5.2-8

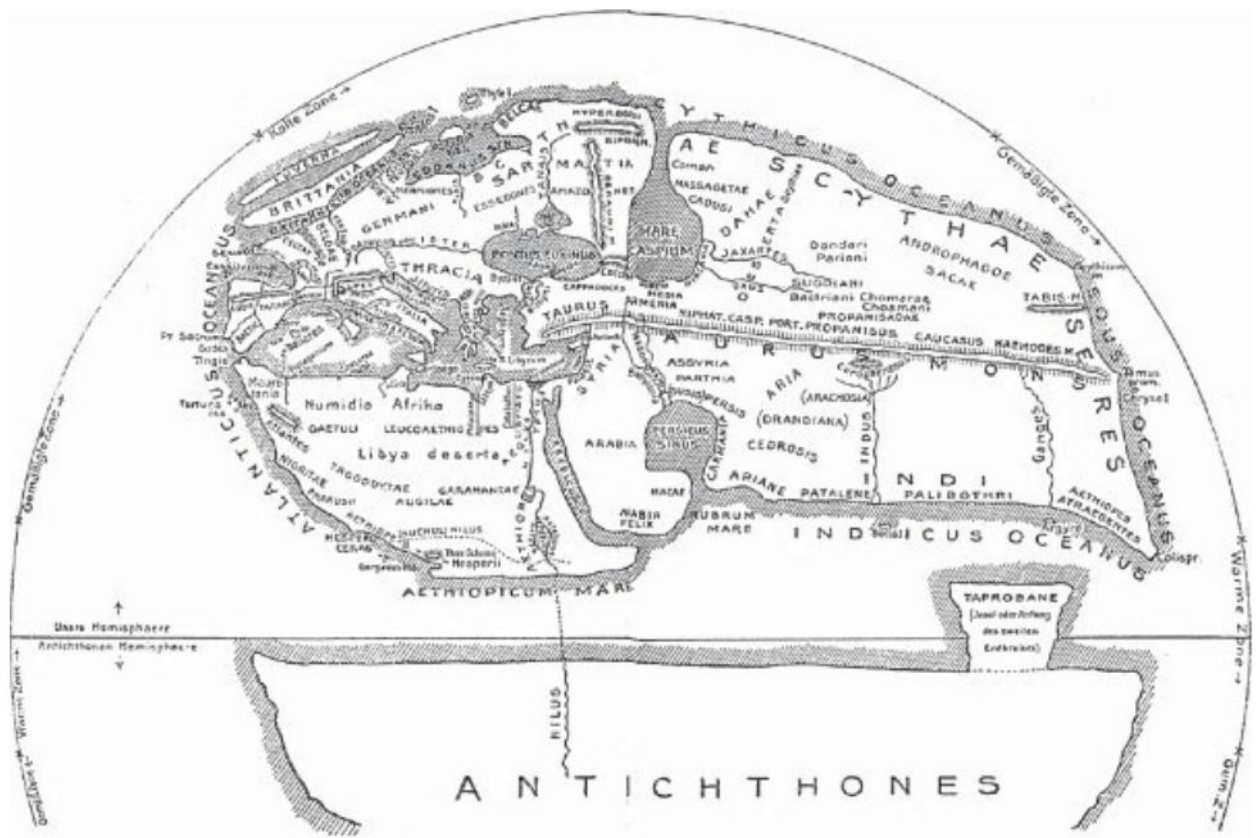
Visual Material: Maps of the Inhabited World (*Oikoumene*) according to Homer, Hecataeus, Herodotus, Strabo and Eratosthenes, Pomponius Mela, Ptolemy (below)



Map 1. World according to Homer and Hecataeus. From *Ginn and Company's Classical Atlas*, map 4 (Boston, 1894). Maps attributed to W. & A. K. Johnston.



Map 2. World according to Herodotus. From Ginn and Company's *Classical Atlas*, map 4 (Boston, 1894). Map attributed to W. & A. K. Johnston.



Map 4. World according to Pomponius Mela. From Philipp, H. (ed), *Pomponius Mela: Ozeanlander* (Leipzig, 1912). Map attributed to H. Philipp.



Map 5. World according to Ptolemy. From *Ginn and Company's Classical Atlas*, map 4 (Boston, 1894). Map attributed to W. & A. K. Johnston.

Week 6 - July 21st (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82473203332>)

Topic: Blacks and Africans

Reading:

Egyptian connections with Argives through Io - Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.1-2, 1.5 (Herodotus provides various accounts of the myth of Io); Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 846-876 (Prometheus prophesies to Io about her future); Aeschylus, *Suppliant Women*, 274-347 (the Danaids [the chorus] flee Egypt to the ancestral land of their mother, Io, but find an unwelcoming King Pelasgus; in order to prove that they should stay, the Danaids explain and dialogue about their ancestry); Apollodorus, *Library*, 2.1.3-4 (genealogies of Argive kings)

Descriptions of the Ethiopians - Diodorus Siculus, *Library*, 3.1-10; Strabo, *Geography*, 17.1.1-3

Ancient Blackface - Petronius, *Satyricon*, 102.14-15 (the characters are trying to flee by realize they are on an enemy ship, so they plan to disguise themselves)

African Physiognomy - Anonymous, *Moretum*, 27-35 (below; from Kennedy, Roy, and Goldman, *Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World*, page 193)

9. Anonymous, *Moretum* 27–35 (1st century CE).

Moretum is typically translated as “salad,” and the anonymous poem is a playfully “epic” description of the making of dinner. In the course of the poem, the hero summons his African slave to help him. It is one of the most extended physical descriptions of an African from the Classical world. (RFK)

Meanwhile, he calls upon Scybale (she was his only attendant, African by race, her entire body proof of her descent, with her twisted hair, thick lips, dark coloring, broad chest, pendulous breasts, concave stomach, thin legs, and profusely spread soles of feet). He calls her and orders her to put wood on the hearth and boil cold water over the flame.

Optional Secondary Reading:

Samuels, Tristan. 2015. “[Herodotus and the Black Body: A Critical Race Theory Analysis](#).” *Journal of Black Studies* 46, no 7: 723-741.

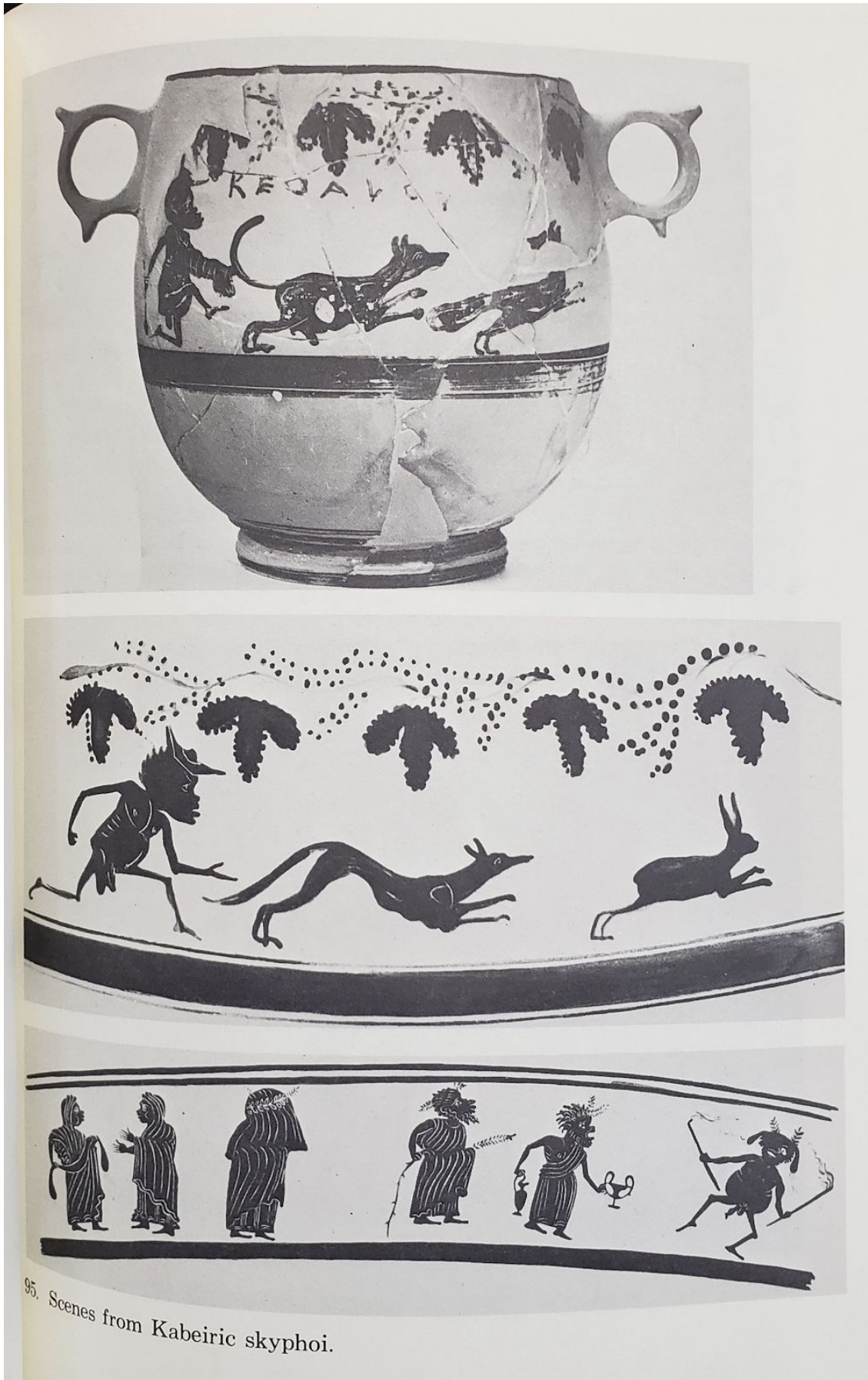
McCoskey, Denise Eileen. “Black Athena, White Power” *Eidolon*. November 15, 2018.

Visual Material (all images taken from Frank Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, Harvard UP, 1970)

Kaberioi (a type of comic portrayal of satyrs)



36. Negroid Circe and Odysseus on Kabeiric skyphos.



95. Scenes from Kabeiric skyphoi.



97. Non-Greek, perhaps Negroid Aphrodite and Hera, from Kabeiric skyphos.

Ethiopians/Blacks

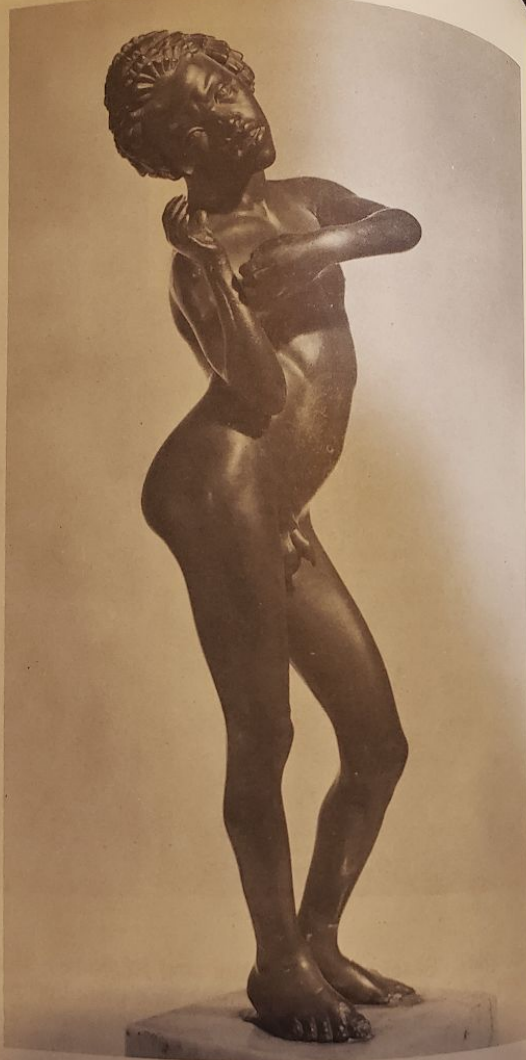




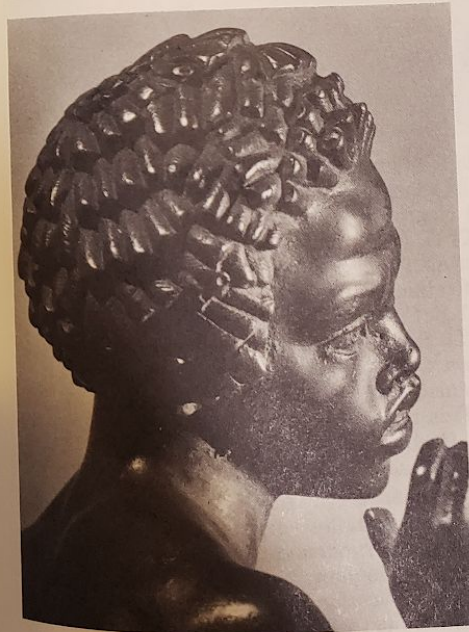
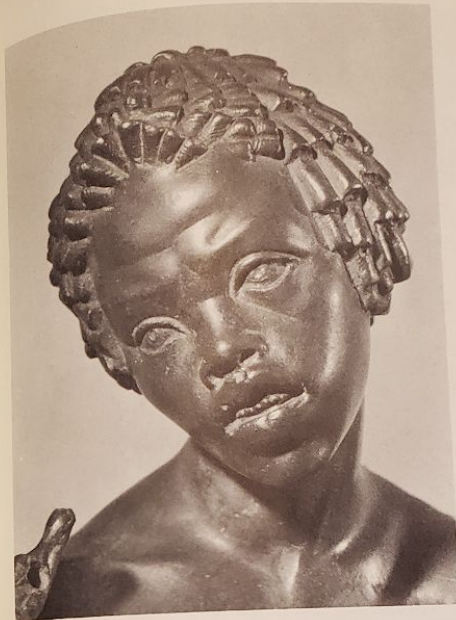
45. Terra cotta of a boy removing thorn from his foot from Priene, ca. second century B.C. A. Köster, *Die griechischen Terrakotten* (Berlin 1926) 89 and plate 100; R. A. Higgins, *Greek Terracottas* (London 1967) 120 and plate 58A.

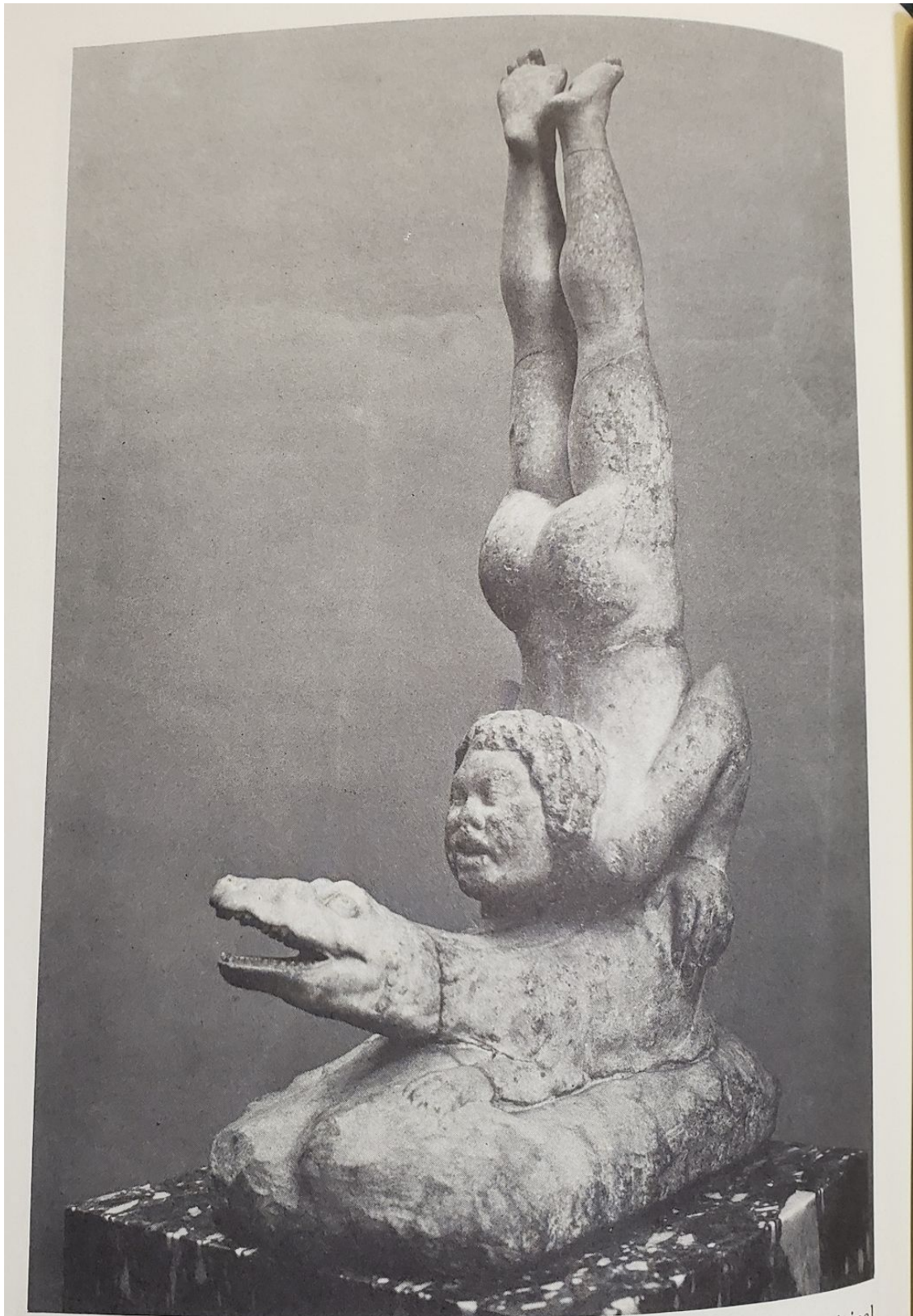


46. Hellenistic terra cotta in the form of a Negro boy sleeping beside an amphora. *Ashmolean Museum Summary Guide Department of Antiquities*⁴ (Oxford 1931) 90.



60. Bronze statuette perhaps of a street singer, Hellenistic — hair somewhat similar to that of bust described below (Figure 61), which it also resembles with respect to nose, though the lips are a little thicker. E. Babelon and J. A. Blanchet, *Catalogue des bronzes antiques de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris 1895) no. 1009; J. Babelon, *Choix de bronzes de la Collection Caylus* (Paris and Brussels 1928) 55-56 and plates XXIII and XXIV. M. Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*, rev. ed. (New York 1961) 96, gives a date of about 200 B.C. for the figure.





107. Acrobat poised on crocodile, Roman after an Hellenistic original.

Week 7 - July 28th

Topic: Blacks and Africans (Part 2)

Reading (continued from last week):

Egyptian connections with Argives through Io - Herodotus, [*Histories*](#), 1.1-2, 1.5

(Herodotus provides various accounts of the myth of Io); Aeschylus, [*Prometheus Bound*](#), 846-876 (Prometheus prophesies to Io about her future); Aeschylus, [*Suppliant Women*](#), 274-347 (the Danaids [the chorus] flee Egypt to the ancestral land of their mother, Io, but find an unwelcoming King Pelasgus; in order to prove that they should stay, the Danaids explain and dialogue about their ancestry); Apollodorus, [*Library*](#), 2.1.3-4 (genealogies of Argive kings)

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Week 8 - August 4th (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83421548665>)

Topic: Persians

Readings:

Persian custom - Herodotus, [*Histories*](#), 1.131-140 (Herodotus relates some customs of the Persians based on his experience)

Mythical relations between Persians and Argives - Herodotus, [*Histories*](#), 7.150 (the Argives stay neutral during the Persian invasion of 480 BC; the Argives did so because they wanted to lead the Greeks (7.149), but Herodotus says this other account of being bribed by Xerxes)

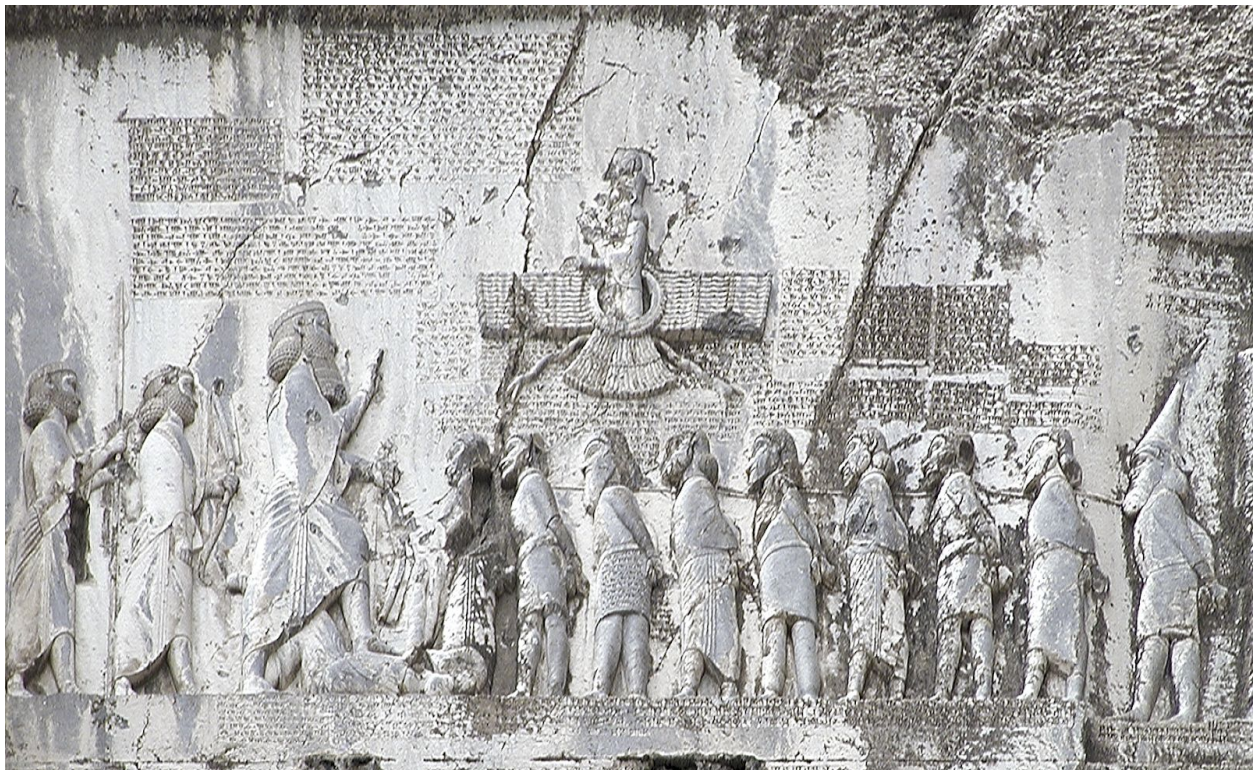
A comic representation of Persians - Aristophanes, [*Acharnians*](#), 61-125 (Dicaeopolis witnessing the arrival of a Persian ambassador to the Athenian assembly in the 420s BC)

The Education of Cyrus - Xenophon, [*Cyropaedia*](#), 1.2.2-8 (Xenophon gives a description of Cyrus the Elder's education)

Persian Royal Inscriptions, [DNb/XPI](#) (this is a translation of XPI by King Xerxes which closely following one by his father Darius (DNb))

Optional: [Behistun Inscription](#) (Persian King Darius recounts how he came to power by suppressing pretenders, revolts, and those who told "the Lie." It gives a Persian perspective on kingship, authority, etc.)

Visual Material: Behistun Inscription Reliefs (Source: Wikimedia commons)





Eurymedon Vase, c. 460 BC (Source: Wikimedia commons)



Week 9 - August 11th (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84346252438>)

Topic: Gauls/Celts, Germans, and Britons

Reading:

Gauls/Celts - Caesar, *The Gallic War*, 4.1-9, 13-15 (events in 55 BC)

Germans - Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome*, 2.118.1; Tacitus, *Germania*, 1-9, 15-22, 27-46

Britons - Tacitus, *Agricola*, 11-12, 15-16, 27.2, 37

Optional Reading: Adam Kirsch "Ideas are Viruses: How Tacitus' *Germania* became the bible of German nationalism." *Slate*. July 25, 2011. (a synopsis of Christopher Krebs' book, *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus' Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2011)

Other geographic regions peoples we do not have time to cover:

The Black Sea region

Phoenicians and Carthaginians

Arabia

India

China

Additional Resources

<https://rfkclassics.blogspot.com/>

<https://multiculturalclassics.wordpress.com/>

[Race & Ethnicity in Classics Pedagogy: A Starter Pack](#)

Essential (but not definitive) Bibliography

Bernal, Martin. 1987. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Vol. I. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Gruen, Erich S., ed. 2011. *Cultural Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute.

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Haley, Shelley P. 1993. "Black Feminist Thought and Classics Re-Membering, Re-Claiming, Re-Empowering." In *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, edited by Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Amy Richlin. New York: Routledge.

Hall, Edith. 1989. *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Isaac, Benjamin. 2004. *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Kennedy, Rebecca F., C. Sydnor Roy, and Max L. Goldman. 2013. *Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Lefkowitz, Mary R., and Guy MacLean Rogers. 1996. *Black Athena Revisited*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press.
- Malkin, Irad, ed. *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*. 2001. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
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- Woolf, Greg. 1988. *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.