

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
HONORS PROGRAM
HON 329-03 – GEOMYTHS & FOSSIL FOLKLORE
Spring 2024

Instructor: Robert Guyker, Ph.D. (He/Him/His)
Class Meeting Day(s) & Time(s): Mon / Wed 4:00–5:15 pm
Classroom: Demille Hall Seminar Rm 107
Office Hours / Location: Appointment, in-person / Zoom
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Wherever we go, we walk upon history.

-Cicero, *De Finibus* 5.2

Just as historical narratives make the bare facts about the human past come alive, the union of mythic imagination and scientific reason gives meaning to the bare bones of prehistory.

-Adrienne Mayor, *First Fossil Hunters*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course critically examines the convergent field of Geomythology. Geomythologists consider the idea that traditional myths and knowledge conserve significant information of natural phenomena and episodes from Earth's deep history. While myths worldwide, as traditional tales, recount the shaping of cosmos, society, and humanity, geomyths concentrate on traditional worldviews about nature, landscape, and (pre)human epochs and ancestors. Fossil folklore traces legends emerging from natural and artistic objects ranging from paleontological oddities to fabulous relics. While geomythologists have tended to focus on the historical observations of natural phenomena by ancient peoples and oral traditions, a discursive drift of applied mythmaking has been noted in expressive social charters, geotourism, and lessons of present-day crisis strategies: climate change, the Anthropocene, environmental justice, postcolonial critiques, and eco-criticism. We consider geomythology as a framework not solely for explaining away curiosities, fabulous beasts, and events of prehistory but understanding the lessons we glean from cultural framings of natural disasters, personhood of the natural world, and cryptids of modern-day legendry. We engage in our ongoing entanglements with landscape, co-inhabitants, and the human mind reconciling within the "mythocene." Geomythology offers a unique opportunity to synthesize the insights of the Human, Social, and Natural Sciences.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Note: Digital versions are linked to accessible databases. All other literature will be provided in Canvas for the relevant class session.

1. Aveni, Anthony. 2021. *Creation Stories: Landscapes and the Human Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
2. Barber, Elizabeth W. and Paul T. Barber. 2004. *When They Severed Earth from Heaven: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rt69>
3. Burbery, Timothy J. 2021. *Geomythology: How Common Stories Reflect Earth Events*. New York: Routledge.
4. Mayor, Adrienne. 2011 [2000]. *The First Fossil Hunters: Dinosaurs, Mammoths, and Myth in Greek and Roman Times*. Princeton University Press.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7s6mm>
5. Mayor, Adrienne. 2005. *Fossil Legends of the First Americans*. Princeton University Press.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt4cgcs9>
6. Piccardi, L. and W. B. Masse, ed. 2007. *Myth and Geology*. Geological Society Special Publication, no. 273. London: Geological Society. Available online:
<https://archive.org/details/MythAndGeology>

GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES

7GS Global Study – Students connect contemporary social and/or environmental topics to their origins and analyze their effects on our increasingly globalized world.

7SI Social Inquiry – Students identify, frame, and analyze social and/or historical structures and institutions in the world today.

7VI Values/Ethics Inquiry – Students articulate how values and ethics inform human understanding, structures, and behavior.

COURSE-SPECIFIC LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Cross-Cultural literacy** – basing our investigation across regions and culture-areas around which critical explorations deepen our awareness of the cultural contexts of the different mythologies.
- **Global Citizenry** – by learning about the geomyths of different peoples around the world, students gain a wider appreciation and awareness of the diverse lifeways of humanity as expressed and revealed in our sacred traditions and narratives in relation the natural world. Students thus gain an enriching global and historical perspective.
- **Engaged Reading & Writing** – through regular assessments and analyses students cultivate a set of skills for self-reflective reading and writing.
- **Hermeneutics** – along with critical reading and writing, students cultivate proficiency in identifying and applying different interpretative lenses to excavate different levels of meaning in geomythic and folkloric texts.
- **Communication** – through writing, rhetorical exercises, oral presentations, and class discussions, students foster their ability to convey their ideas effectively across various rhetorical situations and modalities.
- **Intellectual History** – The term “geomythology” naturally dovetails off the term “mythology,” which itself emerged from a distinct network of ideas about culture, ethnicity and history from early writers of antiquity to the 18th and 19th century of western thought. This course traces the formation of the concept of geomyths as a marked genre of traditional knowledge in general and a class of myths in particular.

- **Content Analysis** – students develop analytical skills geared towards organizing different ranks of literature and data from cultural to scientific sets.

HONORS PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completing a course in the University Honors Program students will have:

- Obtained a starting point for integrative exploration of the development of cultures and intellectual achievements through a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives.
- Sharpened their ability to critically analyze and synthesize a broad range of knowledge through the study of primary texts and through engagement in active learning with fellow students, faculty, and texts (broadly understood);
- Understood how to apply more integrative and interdisciplinary forms of understanding in the advancement of knowledge and in addressing complex challenges shaping the world; Developed effective communication skills, specifically in the areas of written and oral exposition and analysis.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- As a Seminar in ethos, style, and format, our in-class sessions consist of evolving discussions, debates, and critical engagements with the readings and our interpretations.
- Brief lectures accompany class sessions as prologues, interludes, and/or codas to provide context to the given topic and introduce open ended questions for dialogues.
- Active involvement in and outside class conversations is vital, including preparation for each class session having a strong familiarity with the relevant readings, notes at-hand, questions that emerged, and contributions for leading a discussion.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

1. Participation, Attendance, Preparedness

2. **Mythostasis Casebook** – Over the semester, students will compile four case studies applying the rhetorical method of Stasis Theory to available, relevant evidence. Each case should focus on a person, place, thing, or event nestled in a geomyth or fossil legendry. Stasis holds that the investigator pursues a four-fold line of inquiry on facts/conjecture, definition/meaning, quality/value, and policy/action. With the case studies of geomyths, is it an open, closed, or cold case? What are the persuasive elements and appeals in the cultural rhetoric of the mythological account? How are geological and paleontological elements integrated? Have any policies emerged or should be pursued considering the case? For an added twist, incendiary fabulations such as pseudo-archaeology and earth conspiracies in need of fact-checking can be pursued.

- Stasis 1 – Due Week 3
- Stasis 2 – Due Week 6
- Stasis 3 – Due Week 9
- Stasis 4 – Due Week 12

3. Bi-weekly Section Quizzes

4. **Epimythia** – Each student chooses their most compelling Stasis, presents the case, and addresses questions from Instructor and peers.

Grade Weights

15% Attendance, Participation, Preparedness

30% Section Quizzes
40% Mythostasis Casebooks
15% Epimythia

Grading Scale

A 100 % to 94.0% A- < 94.0 % to 90.0%
B+ < 90.0 % to 87.0% B < 87.0 % to 84.0% B- < 84.0 % to 80.0%
C+ < 80.0 % to 77.0% C < 77.0 % to 74.0% C- < 74.0 % to 70.0%
D+ < 70.0 % to 67.0% D < 67.0 % to 64.0% D- < 64.0 % to 61.0%
F < 61.0 % to 00.0%

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity Policy

“Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor/administrator and referral to the university Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions including expulsion. Please see the full description of Chapman University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

AI, ChatGPT and other Large Language Model (LLM) chatbots:

1. Chatbots (AI Generated Text Tools) do offer clear, useful information, but it is the user's responsibility to verify the accuracy of that information. It is still too early to fully determine the impact of AI Generative tools; however, throughout this semester (and through your academic career) we will all discover ways these tools can help enhance your learning and prepare you for their use in the workplace.
2. Chatbots are often inaccurate and “hallucinate”. Consider Dr. Ruppel’s case: “When I asked for a biography of Richard Ruppel, a Chapman English professor, I found that I was born in Fairview (false), had been an expert on the Holocaust (mostly false), had graduated from Yale and Harvard (false), and was now dead (demonstrably, I hope, false).” People in the field describe these errors as “hallucinations,” but they are presented with supreme self-confidence. Hallucinations are not uncommon.
3. The university's policy on plagiarism and academic dishonesty applies to any uncited or improperly cited use of work created by AI Generative tools (i.e., non-human beings), or by other human beings as your own. For example, typing a prompt into an LLM chatbot, copying the response, and then submitting that response for an assignment is a form of academic misconduct. Be Very Careful!
4. Don't be “sus”: If there is suspected use of pasted text in a response produced by an LLM, a check with the various detection services will be carried out. If those services confirm suspicions, a conference over the matter will be scheduled.

For more information on guidelines of use, resources, and literature on AI, see [Chapman Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Hub](#).

Students with Disabilities Policy

“In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to contact the Disability Services Office. If you will need to utilize your approved accommodations in this

class, please follow the proper notification procedure for informing your professor(s). This notification process must occur more than a week before any accommodation can be utilized. Please contact [Disability Services](#) at (714) 516-4520 if you have questions regarding this procedure or for information or to make an appointment to discuss and/or request potential accommodations based on documentation of your disability. Once formal approval of your need for an accommodation has been granted, you are encouraged to talk with your professor(s) about your accommodation options. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.”

Equity and Diversity Policy

“Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in Chapman’s [Harassment and Discrimination Policy](#). Please see the full description of this policy. Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the dean of students and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.”

Course Policies & Procedures

Communication

The best way to contact me is Email, or Canvas messaging. Let’s keep a good line of communication! When emailing, identify yourself, use course name and meeting dates in subject heading.

Preparation, Attendance, and Participation

- **Preparation** – Come to class having read/viewed/listened to the assigned reading, viewings and/or clips ahead of time. To be considered “prepared” for the class session, be ready to discuss the material together.
- **Attendance** – In-person attendance is mandatory for the duration of the course. You must also commit to additional time outside of class meetings to complete assigned course work. Be courteous and on-time for each class. Following the University’s minimal policy, students who are absent beyond 20 percent of the course will risk an automatic Fail. Students who do not attend the first class meeting of the course in which they are registered may be administratively dropped, unless they make arrangements with the instructor prior to the first day of class.
 - Excused absences policy: You have three unexcused absences to use at your discretion but please do me the courtesy of notifying a week before the relevant class session(s).
- **Participation** – Each student must show active involvement during class and respond with productive contribution when called upon. Participation also includes regular responsive access to their Chapman student email and signs of regular Canvas activity. **Any/All emergent Class Discussions posted to Canvas** are folded into Participation for the class session. This course features significant experiential and experimental components long the way and cannot be replicated in make-up assignments. Student presence and participation are essential.

Missed Quizzes & Late Assignments

Due to the policy of the quizzes being 1) open-note, open-book and 2) completed at the student’s discretion during the period of availability, missed quizzes cannot be offered thereafter. Please keep the Quiz Schedule handy.

- Grading policy: Lowest quiz score will be dropped.

Late assignments will be marked down one whole letter grade immediately, followed by another whole letter grade each week after the assignment’s due date.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 Jan 29 & 31 – Promythion

- Class 1 INTRODUCTION: Opening remarks and review of Syllabus
- Class 2 Myth & the Sciences
 - Mythonymy and the politics of naming
 - Readings – Masse et al. in *Myth & Geology*, pp. 9–28; Aveni 2021 (Prologue, Intro, Epilogue)

Week 2 Feb 5 & 7 – Geomythology’s Origins

- Class 3 Intellectual History of Myth
- Class 4 Rise of Geomythology & Fossil Folklore
- Readings for the week – Burby 2021, Intro; Vitaliano 1968 and in *Myth & Geology*, pp. 1–8

Week 3 Feb 12 & 14 – Salient Geomyths: Geohazards & the Bones of Monstrosities

- Class 5 Dragons, Giants & Monsters
- Class 6 Volcanoes & Earthquakes
- Readings for the week – Burby 2021, ch. 1 & 3; Barber & Barber 2004 (ch. 8, 18)
- **Stasis 1 Due Friday**

Week 4 Feb 19 & 21 – Salient Geomyths: Natural Disasters & Fabled Floods

- Class 7 Flood & Tsunami Myths
- Class 8 Traditional & Scholarly Toponymies
- Readings for the week – Burby 2021, ch. 2; Mayor in *Myth & Geology*; Barber & Barber 2004 (ch. 9 & 10)

Week 5 Feb 26 & 28 – Regional Geomyths: Asia I

- Class 9 Near East & Biblical geomyths
 - Readings – Roberts in *Myth & Geology*, pp. 39–50; Trifonov in *Myth & Geology*, pp. 133–42; Aveni
- Class 10 Far East geomyths
 - Xing et al. 2011
 - Readings – Aveni 2021 (ch. 2 & 17)

Week 6 Mar 4 & 6 – Regional Geomyths: Asia II

- Class 11 Geotourism of S.E. Asia
 - Readings: Unjah & Abdul Halim 2017; Abdurahman & Sukamto Kadarisman 2022
- Class 12 Geomyths of India
 - Readings – Chandrasekharam in *Myth & Geology*, pp. 29–38; Geer, Dermitzakis & de Vos. 2008
- **Stasis 2 Due Friday**

Week 7 Mar 11 & 13 – Regional Geomyths: Europe I

- Class 13 Greco-Roman geomyths & fossil legends, pt 1
 - Mayor 2011 (Intro – ch. 2)

- Class 14 Greek-Roman geomyths & fossil legends, pt 2
 - Mayor 2011 (ch. 3 – 6)
 - Aveni 2021 (ch. 1; Epilogue)

Week 8 Mar 18–23 – Spring Break Enjoy the break!

Week 9 Mar 25 & 27 – Regional Myths: Europe II

- Class 15 Western & Norther Europe
 - Medieval Legends of relics
 - Readings: Burbery 2015; McNamara in *Myth & Geology*, pp. 279–94
- Class 16 Norse Earth Legends
 - Readings: Mörner in *Myth & Geology*, pp. 117–20; Aveni 2021 (ch. 20); Nordvig 2021
- **Stasis 3 Due Friday**

Week 10 Apr 1 & 3 – Regional Myths: Africa & Oceania

- Class 17 African geomyths
 - Readings: Shanklin in *Myth & Geology*, pp. 165–76; Helm & Benoit 2019
- Class 18 Volcanoes & Legends of the Pacific
 - Readings: Hamacher & Norris 2009; Nunn & Pastorizo in *Myth & Geology*, pp. 143–64; Bryant, Walsh & Abbot in *Myth & Geology*, pp. 203–14; Aveni 2021 (ch. 11, 14, 15, 16)

Week 11 Apr 8 & 10 – Regional Myths: Americas

- Class 19 Fossil Legendry of N. America
- Class 20 Fossil Legendry of N. America
- Readings: Mayor 2005 (Intro., ch. 1,4, 5); Aveni 2021 (ch. 10, 18, 19, 21)

Week 12 Apr 15 & 17 – Regional Myths: Americas

- Class 21 Fossil Legendry of Southwest
- Class 22 Fossil Legendry of Mesoamerica
- Readings: Mayor 2005 (ch. 2, 3, Conclusion); Aveni 2021 (ch. 3, 4, 12)
- **Stasis 4 Due Friday**

Week 13 Apr 22 & 24 – Regional Myths: S. America

- Class 23 South American geomyths
- Class 24 South American geomyths
- Readings for the week: Aveni 2021 (ch. 5, 6, 13, 22); Masse & Masse in *Myth & Geology*, pp. 177–202

Week 14 Apr 29 & May 1 – Epimythia

- Class 25 & 26 Stasis Case Presentations

Week 15 May 6 & 8 – Epimythia

- Class 27 & 28 Stasis Case Presentations

FINALS Week May 13 – Epimythia 4:15–6:45 PM: Stasis Case Presentations wrap-up

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OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

- Dinosaur Database <https://dinosaurpictures.org/>
- D-PLACE, the Database of Places, Language, Culture, and Environment <https://d-place.org>
- Fossils and Paleontology, National Park Service <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/fossils/index.htm>
- Paleobiology Database Navigator <https://paleobiodb.org/>