

Course Number

AH 319-0-1

Course Title

Comparative Approaches to Ancient Empires

Quarter/Year

Winter 2022

Day/Time

TR 2-3:20 p.m.

Instructor

Gunter

Distro Fulfillment

Majors and Minors



Course Description

Stimulated by current interest in decolonization and globalization, the study of ancient empires is now thriving. A major research trend adopts a comparative, cross-cultural framework to try to understand and explain commonalities and differences, which this course explores. Did the first complex territorial states we call empires emerge and develop in similar ways? What factors or institutions were crucial to their trajectory and success, and what theories have been proposed to account for them? What are the benefits and challenges of a comparative,

multidisciplinary perspective, and what new kinds of histories might it produce? Many recent investigations compare Rome and Qin/Han China; others consider the historical sequence of empires in the Middle East, such as the Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid Persian empires; still others analyze characteristics of imperial formation and rule in historically unrelated empires in different geographical regions and eras.

This course examines selected case studies drawn from a wide geographical and chronological range, with special focus on the ancient Mediterranean and Middle East. We will examine different aspects of territorial expansion, consolidation, and rule, including state ideology, bureaucracy, cosmopolitanism, urbanism, borders and frontiers, religion, and the creation and circulation of the imperial image. Readings will represent contributions by scholars working in different disciplines, including history, art history, and archaeology.

Required Textbooks

None required.

Assessments

Written responses to readings, class discussion and presentations, short paper.

## Contact.

[art-history@northwestern.edu](mailto:art-history@northwestern.edu)  
[www.arthistory.northwestern.edu](http://www.arthistory.northwestern.edu)