

HUM2x: The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours: Advice to Participants, from Prof. Gregory Nagy

§1. My words of advice here are intended especially for those who have never read any ancient Greek literature—even in translation—and who have no background in ancient Greek history or art. For those of you who find yourselves in this category—and I know you are the vast majority—my advice is meant to support you, encourage you, and to cheer you on. For those of you who are familiar with some or even most aspects of Greek literature, I suggest that you read my pointers anyway, since they will show you how the readings are organized.

§2. The project is divided into 24 units. These units are called “Hours” because they match the 24 hours of direct contact time I spend with students in the Harvard University classroom.

§3. These 24 hours match the chapters of an open-access (free) online book that comes with the project. This e-book is called *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*. From here on, I will call this book simply “H24H.” I must stress that you do not have to read all or even most of *H24H* in order to participate in this project. But I do expect you to consult it systematically as you go through the 24 hours, hour by hour. And you will need to do a *slow reading* of all the translated texts that I quote in *H24H* (for example, Text A, Text B, Text C, etc. in Hour 0; Text A, Text B, Text C, etc. in Hour 1; Text A, Text B, Text C, etc. in Hour 2; and so on). Also, you will need to do a *fast reading* of all the translated texts that I have assigned in the schedule of readings that is coming up in the next paragraph, §4. This schedule is keyed to an open-access (free) online *Sourcebook of Original Greek Texts Translated into English* that also comes with the project. Before I show you the schedule of readings in §5, let me explain to you what I mean by *slow reading* and *fast reading*.

§4. I will start by explaining *slow reading* in §4a and then move on to *fast reading* in §4b. For the reading of the following paragraph, §4a, you will have to slow down and take more time. For the reading of the paragraphs after that, §4b, §6, §7, §8, and the Appendix, I hope you will feel free to speed up again.

§4a. So here is the paragraph that needs to slow you down until you have finished reading it (and this paragraph includes the moderately long quotation that you see ahead). Please give yourself about five minutes. That

said, let me delve into it. *When you do slow reading in this project, you have to slow down and give yourself time to stop and think about what you are reading.* You have to do this even if you feel at first that you simply do not have the time to do this. You have to develop a sense for feeling that you really do have the time to stop your reading and to think about what you have just read, allowing yourself to make connections with what you have read earlier. Some people think that *philology* is the “art” of such *slow reading*. Classical philologist and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche¹ was one of these people, and he compared the “art” of this “philology” to the art of the goldsmith:

Philology is that venerable art which demands of its votaries one thing above all: to go aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow—it is a goldsmith’s art and connoisseurship of the *word* which has nothing but delicate cautious work to do and achieves nothing if it does not achieve it *lento*. But for precisely this reason it is more necessary than ever today; by precisely this means does it entice and enchant us the most, in the midst of an age of “work,” that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to “get everything done” at once, including every old or new book—this art does not easily get anything done, it teaches to read *well*, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate fingers and eyes.²

In closing, let me highlight one big change I made in the translation I just quoted: the translator had written “with delicate eyes and fingers,” but Nietzsche in the original German text mentions fingers first and eyes second—in order to drive home his comparison of philology with the art of the goldsmith: when you read slowly, you read with a sense of touch—with “delicate fingers and eyes” (*mit zarten Fingern und Augen*). We see here an example of *reading out of the text* instead of *reading into the text* (I will define these terms in §8).

Now that I am finished with this paragraph, please feel free to go back into a mode of fast reading.

§4b. *When you do fast reading of the texts in the Sourcebook, try not to get stuck or bogged down, but push ahead, and keep pushing ahead until you reach a pre-arranged stopping point.* If you do not understand something as you are reading it for the first time, just move on. The ancient texts you are reading give you many chances to “get it,” even if you cannot seem to “get it” the first time around.

§5. A schedule of readings and release dates are given in the document “HUM2X Release Date and Activities”. This includes parts of the *H24H* e-book, the slow reading passages, and the other reading selections.

§6. The texts selected from Greek literature that you see quoted and analyzed in the free book *H24H* (for example, Text A, Text B, Text C, etc. in Hour 1) are all my own translations. In the free Sourcebook, by contrast, the translations are the work of others (except for the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and the Hesiodic *Works and Days*, which are my translations). Even in the case of those texts that others have translated, like the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Samuel Butler, I have adjusted the wording in many ways. The highlighting of parts of the translations in the Sourcebook indicates that the highlighted parts are borrowed from my own translations in *H24H*.

§7. Each analysis of each one of the selected texts that I translate in *H24H* is an exercise in *close reading*. Here is what I mean: you are doing a *close reading* of a text when you *read it slowly* and you try to *read out of the text*, not *into the text*. When I say *to read out of the text*, I mean that we need to analyze a text within its own context, instead of looking at it through the lens of our own worldview. This way, you avoid reading your values *into* the ancient Greek texts, which have their own values. When we *read into the text*, we are assuming that the ancient Greeks had the same values that we have. When we *read out of the text*, by contrast, we are trying to learn their values, which are often quite different from ours. In any case, we must be objective in trying to figure out what their values were. We have to rely on their texts and on the language that shapes their texts, and so their language needs to be translated as accurately as possible into English. The translations that I provide in the book *H24H* are meant to show a special degree of accuracy. That is why the English of my translations in *H24H* is sometimes harder to read than the English of the translations you find in the Sourcebook. Here is another way I can put it: my translations of the original Greek texts in *H24H* are good for *slow reading*, whereas most of the translations in the Sourcebook are better for *fast reading*.

§8. You might be tempted to ask: what was the basis for choosing which texts to read slowly? My answer would be: the 245 texts that I have chosen include examples of some of the greatest moments in Greek literature. But then I would add: in a parallel universe, I could have chosen a completely different set of texts that would also include some of the greatest moments in this literature. My choices, then, are simply points of departure leading to other choices for slow reading.

Appendix I: On *H24H* and the Sourcebook

I quote here the first three paragraphs of *H24H*, which give background on this book and also on the Sourcebook:

The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours is based on a course that I have taught at Harvard University ever since the late 1970s. This course, "Concepts of the Hero in Classical Greek Civilization," now renamed "The Ancient Greek Hero," centers on selected readings of texts, *all translated from the original Greek into English*. The texts include the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; the Hesiodic *Theogony* and *Works and Days*; selected songs of Sappho and Pindar; selections from the Histories of Herodotus; the *Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers*, and *Eumenides* of Aeschylus; the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles; the *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae* of Euripides; and the *Apology* and *Phaedo* of Plato. Also included are selections from Pausanias and Philostratus. These texts are supplemented by pictures, taken mostly from Athenian vase paintings. Copies of those pictures are shown in Hour 7.

The texts I have just listed are available free of charge in the online *Sourcebook of Original Greek Texts Translated into English* (available here on the project website), which I have edited with the help of fellow teachers and researchers. The process of editing this Sourcebook is an ongoing project that I hope will outlast my own lifetime. All the translations in this online Sourcebook are free from copyright restrictions. That is because the translations belong either to me, to other authors who have waived copyright, or to authors who died in a time that precedes any further application of copyright. The texts of these translations in the Sourcebook are periodically reviewed and modified, and the modifications are indicated by way of special formatting designed to show the differences between the original translator's version and the modified version.

The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours is divided into five parts. The number of hours dedicated to each part is tightened up as the argumentation intensifies, and the hours themselves get shorter. Part I, taking up Hours 1 through 12, is primarily about heroes as reflected in the oldest surviving forms of ancient Greek epic and lyric poetry. Part II, Hours 13 through 15, is about heroes as reflected in a variety of prose media. Part III, Hours 16 through 21, is about heroes in ancient Greek tragedy. Part IV, Hours 22–23, is about heroes as reflected in two dialogues of Plato. And Part V, confined to Hour 24, is about the hero as a transcendent concept. In two of the Hours, there are

additional sections. Hour 7 is followed by sections numbered Hour 7a, Hour 7b, Hour 7c, and so on; similarly, Hour 8 is followed by sections numbered Hour 8a, Hour 8b, Hour 8c, and so on. These sections will add more hours of reading, and you may choose to postpone them in the course of a first reading.

Appendix II: An Introduction to Self-Assessment Exercises

There are three types of self-assessment exercises for each Hour of the 24 Hours of “Heroes.” These exercises involve thinking about and responding to three sets of questions. The questions in the first set are about the content of what you have been reading in the translations of the Greek texts assigned for each given Hour and in the e-book, *The Ancient Hero in 24 Hours*, while the questions in the second set are based on close readings of selections from these Greek texts. These selections are labeled as Text A, Text B, Text C, and so on, in each Hour. Examples of such close readings, averaging ten Texts in each Hour, are provided in the e-book *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*, henceforth abbreviated as *H24H*. Finally you are asked to answer self-reflection questions that track your engagement with the content, conversation, and community. This engagement with the texts, with dialogue, and with each other is the heart of this project.

If you want to track your score in answering the questions in these three types of self-assessment exercises, here is the rationale. The answers to the questions in the Annotation Exercises are the most important for gauging your mastery of the overall concepts in this project. The answers to the questions in the Annotation Exercises carry 58% of the overall score of your self-assessment, while the answers to the Content Questions carry 28%, and the engagement self-reflection questions carry 14%. You can work at your own pace, although scores will not be updated after the end date. Participants who wish to earn a Verified Certificate need to complete all self-assessment exercises by the end date with a combined average score of 50% or greater.

Notes to “Advice for Participants” above

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche was appointed Professor of Greek Literature at the University of Basel when he was just 25 years old and had not even completed his PhD. But he had already published a series of articles displaying full mastery of the philological method as it was practiced in Bonn where he was trained by Friedrich Ritschl. In April 1869 Nietzsche arrived at Basel, and 1872 marked the appearance of his highly philosophical book *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music (Die Geburt der Tragödie aus*

dem Geiste der Musik), the publication of which alienated Nietzsche from the philological community. Nevertheless, he was to become one of the most famous and influential Hellenists of modern times.

² The translation here is adapted (with only slight changes) from R. J. Hollingdale, *Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* (Cambridge, 1982), 5. The original German text: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröthe. Nachgelassene Fragmente, Anfang 1880 bis Frühjahr 1881*. Nietzsche Werke V.1, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin, 1971), 9.