

RELS 375 - TOPICS IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGION

PROPHECY AND DIVINATION IN THE HEBREW BIBLE AND THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

*College of Charleston
Spring 2011*

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines prophecy and divination in the Hebrew Scriptures and the ancient Near East, encompassing Mesopotamia (Babylonians and Assyrians), Egypt, Anatolia (the Hittites), and the Levant (Canaanites, Phoenicians, and, most prominently, the ancient Israelites). Beginning with Egypt and Mesopotamia, we will look at the various techniques used by peoples in their attempts to obtain information, hopefully positive, from the gods. Topics to be examined include “predictions” of future times of political/social upheaval, oracles in festival processions, prophecy through dreams/visions, ecstatic behavior associated with prophets, omen texts, reading of entrails (e.g., sheep livers), casting of lots, and necromancy. A significant portion of the class will be devoted to prophets/prophecy as presented in the Hebrew Bible, including the social location of prophets, prophetic oracles in their historical/political setting, prophetic critique of the religious/political status quo, the issue of prophetic authority (true and false prophets), female prophets and feminist readings of the prophetic corpus, and cognitive dissonance (resolution of dissonance as hermeneutic) in the prophetic corpus.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1) A translation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The first named edition (NRSV) is preferred for this class, although a few other translations are permissible as well.

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV; Oxford University Press, 1991). The Oxford Study edition is widely used in theological schools and colleges (3rd ed., 2001; now in a 4th edition, fully revised, although the translation itself is unchanged).

TANAKH: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text (NJPS; Jewish Publication Society, 1986; revised 1999). Also available in an excellent study edition (*The Jewish Study Bible*; Oxford, 2004).

2) Martti Nissinen et al. (trans.). *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*. Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World 12 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). = PPANE

3) Martti Nissinen (ed.). *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*. SBL Symposium Series 13 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) = PANEC

4) John Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*. Revised and enlarged edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

5) Electronic Reserve readings (two folders, one for material on the ancient Near East, excluding the Hebrew Bible, and the second for articles etc. relating to the Hebrew Bible and ancient Israel). To access these, click Library on the college homepage, then e-reserves (sub quick links), then enter course or instructor name to obtain the list of my classes. The password is *apilum*.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

FOUR PAPERS (12% each). Over the course of the term, students will turn in four short papers (4-6 pages each) on topics selected by the professor. These may deal, for example, with various topics of scholarly debate or seminal works in the field, or a comparison of two or more ancient Near Eastern or biblical texts. Where necessary, materials for these, outside of the text book and e-reserve readings, will be made available in class. Students will have the option of writing the first two papers and then a longer research paper on a topic of their interest (approved by the professor).

PRESENTATIONS ON ASSIGNED READINGS (6% each). Over the course of the term, each student will give two *brief* presentations (6-8 minutes) on one of the assigned readings. He or she should provide the class with a one page summary of the major points and/or arguments of the reading, along with discussion questions.

CUMULATIVE FINAL ESSAY EXAMINATION (25%). This is a take-home exam, due on the final exam date set for the class: **May 2**.

CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (15%). Given the smaller size of the class, it is imperative that you attend and actively participate in class discussion. If only a few participate, I will randomly call on individuals. If you are consistently unable to respond and it is clear you've not done the readings, this will be noted by me in the determination of your final grade. Attendance will be taken at some point during class each day. Barring exceptional circumstances, students should not miss more than **three** classes over the course of the term. Any number greater than this will negatively affect your grade for the course.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

(Note: All readings should be done *in advance* of the class for which they are assigned. I will assume you have read the material carefully.) This schedule is subject to revision.

Introduction (Jan. 10-12)

The ancient Near East: Geography and Religion

Defining terms: “prophecy,” “prophet,” “divination” etc.

Readings: PPANE, pp. 1-11; Petersen in PANEC, pp. 33-44

Overholt, “The Social Dynamics of Prophetic Activity”

Wilson, “Prophecy in Modern Societies” (E-Reserves, Folder I, #1)

*****Jan. 17 - Martin Luther King Day (no class)*****

Ancient Egypt (Jan. 19-24)

Two Egyptian Literary Texts

Readings: “The Words of Neferti” and “The Dialogue of Ipuur and the Lord of All” (ER Folder I, #2)

Egyptian Oracles/Prophecies, Royal and Otherwise

Readings: “The Divine Nomination of Thutmose III” (ER I, #3)
“The Divine Nomination of an Ethiopian King” (ER I, #3)
“Divine Oracle through a Dream” (ER I, #3)
Baines, “Magic and Divination” (ER I, # 4)
Černý, “Egyptian Oracles” and Kruchten, “Oracles” (ER I, #5)

Ancient Mesopotamia (Jan. 26–Feb. 7)

Oracles, Omens and Divination in Babylonia and Anatolia

Readings: Gurney, “The Babylonians and Hittites” (ER I, #6)
Kitz, “Prophecy as Divination”
Nissinen, “Prophecy and Omen Divination: Two Sides of the Same Coin”
Selected omens from the series “If a City is Set on a Height” (handout)
PPANE, nos. 66-67 (“Esnunna Oracles”)
Rochberg, “‘If P, then Q’: Form and Reasoning in Babylonian Divination”
Velduis, “Reading the Signs”
Hittite Divination (handout)

Prophets and Prophecy at Mari

Readings: PPANE, nos. 1-50, plus 51, 52, 55, 61, 64, and 65); also review terms for prophets on pp. 6-7
van der Toorn, “From the Oral to the Written: The Case of Old Babylonian Prophecy” (I, # 9)

Ancient Mesopotamia cont. (Feb. 9-16)

Neo-Assyrian Royal Oracles/Prophecies

Readings: PPANE, pp. 97-132 (nos. 68-96); also context in nos. 97-101, 105
Nissinen, “The Socioreligious Role of the Neo-Assyrian Prophets”
(= PANEC, pp. 89-114)
Stökl, “Female Prophets in the Ancient Near East”
van der Toorn in PANEC, pp. 71-87

Royal Queries to the Sun-God Shamash

Readings: “Oracular Queries to the Sun-God Shamash” (ER I, # 11);
State Archives of Assyria volumes available on-line at
<<http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saa/corpus>>
Starr, “Introduction” (copy pp. XVI-XLVI)
Jean, “Divination and Oracles at the Neo-Assyrian Palace”

The Levant (Feb. 21)

Prophets and Prophecy in West Semitic Texts (plus a reference from Egypt)

Readings: PPANE, nos. 136-142

Dijkstra, "Is Balaam Among the Prophets?" (up to p. 60)

Pardee, Divination at Ugarit (handout)

Introduction to Hebrew Bible (Feb. 23-28)

Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible: The Prophetic Canon and its Academic Study

Readings: Blenkinsopp, pp. 1-26

Barton, "The Prophets in the Canon" (ER Folder II, #1)

Clements, "The Prophet and his Editors" (ER II, #3)

Carroll, "Prophecy and Society"

Defining a Prophet in Ancient Israel

Readings: Blenkinsopp, pp. 26-39

Petersen, "Rethinking the Nature of Prophetic Literature" (ER II, #2)

Grabbe, "The Problems of Definition"

The Samuel Traditions (March 2)

The Priest/Prophet Samuel and the Monarchy

Bible: 1 Samuel 1-16

Other: Blenkinsopp, pp. 40-55

Wilson, "Early Israelite Prophecy" (ER #7)

Parker, "Possession Trance and Prophecy in Pre-exilic Israel"

Grabbe ("Problems" on trance)

******March 7-9 Spring Break******

Some "Early" Prophets in the Hebrew Bible (March 14)

Balaam the Seer and Micaiah the Son of Imlah

Bible: Numbers 22-24 (Balaam)

1 Kings 22:1-38 (Micaiah)

Other: Blenkinsopp, p. 62

Wilson, "Early Israelite Prophecy" (review)

Dijkstra, "Is Balaam among the Prophets?" (pp. 60-64)

Roberts, "Does God Lie? Divine Deceit as a Theological Problem..."

Early Israelite Prophecy cont. (March 16)

Elijah and Elisha

Bible: 1 Kings 17-21 (Elijah)

2 Kings 1-9, 13:14-21 (Elisha)

Other: Blenkinsopp, pp. 55-64

Divination in the Hebrew Bible (March 21)

Divination in the Hebrew Bible

Bible: Dreams/Visions (Gen. 15, 37, 39-41, 46:1-4)
Teraphim (Genesis 31:19, 34-35; 1 Sam. 19:11-17; Hosea 3:4)
Urim/Thummim (Deut. 33:8; Num. 27:18-23; 1 Sam. 14:36-42;
Ezra 2:62-63)
Necromancy (1 Samuel 28)
Ephod (Exod. 28:15-30; Lev. 8:5-9)
Deuteronomy 13:1-4; 18:9-14 (the Deuteronomistic view of prophecy)

Other: Grabbe, "Introduction to Divination" etc.
Kitz, "The Plural Form of 'Urim and Thummim"
Hurowitz, "True Light on the Urim and Thummim"

Classical ("Writing") Prophets (March 23-28)

The Emergence of Written Oracles: Amos and Hosea

Bible: Books of Amos and Hosea (all)
Other: Blenkinsopp, pp. 65-97
Holladay, "Assyrian Statecraft..." (ER II, #8)
Barton, "The Theology of Amos"
Overholt, "Features of the Prophetic Process"
Baumann, "Hosea: 'Primal Text' of the Prophetic Marriage Imagery"
Additional reading for Hosea TBA

Cognitive Dissonance and The Isaiah Tradition (March 30)

Isaiah of Jerusalem ("First Isaiah")

Bible: Isaiah 1-39
Other: Blenkinsopp, pp. 97-110
Collins, "The Sign of Immanuel" (on Isaiah 7:14)
Carroll, "Theory of Cognitive Dissonance" and "Text and Interpretation I"
(ER # 12; read up to section on Second Isaiah)

Nahum and the Problem of Divine Violence (April 4)

Bible: Nahum (all)
Other: Becking, "Divine Wrath and the Conceptual Coherence of Nahum"
O'Brien, "Nahum and Atrocity"

The End of National Independence (April 6)

Jeremiah and False Prophecy

Bible: Jeremiah 1-33 (esp. 23-29)
Other: Blenkinsopp, pp. 129-47
Long, "Social Dimensions of Prophetic Conflict"
Wilson, "An Anthropological Perspective on the Problem of False

Prophecy" (ER #14)
Carroll, "The Limits of Prophecy" (ER # 15)

Gender in the Book of Ezekiel (April 11-13)

Pornoprophetics

Bible: Ezekiel 1-23

Other: Blenkinsopp, pp.165-80

Shields, "An Abusive God? Identity and Power/Gender and Violence in Ezekiel 23"

Patton, "Should Our Sister be Treated Like a Whore'? A Response to Feminist Critiques of Ezekiel 23"

Carroll, "Adaptive Prediction" (ER #18; review section on Ezekiel in ER #15)

Monotheism and the Making of the Gods (April 18)

The Second (or Deutero-) Isaiah

Bible: Isaiah 40-55

Other: Blenkinsopp, pp. 182-93

Smith, "Monotheism in Isaiah 40-55"

Dick, "Worshiping Idols: What Isaiah Didn't Know"

Carroll (read section on Second Isaiah in #12)

Restoration, Temple, and Messiah (April 20)

Two Visions of the New Judah: Haggai and Zechariah

Bible: Book of Haggai and Zechariah 1-8

Other: Blenkinsopp, pp. 194-212

Coggins, "The Historical Setting," "Prophets under Alien Rule" (ER # 21)

Carroll, "Text and Interpretation II" (ER #22)

The End of Prophecy...or Not? (April 25)

The Post-Exilic Period and Beyond

Greenspahn, "Why Prophecy Ceased" (on-line)

Sommers, "Did Prophecy Cease?" (on-line)