

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES 298: SPECIAL TOPICS
RELIGIONS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST
COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON
SPRING 2008**

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course we explore the religious beliefs and practices of those peoples of the ancient Near East (including Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Canaanites, and Israelites). Our examination covers a wide range of material, both geographically and chronologically, spanning a period of nearly 3,000 years, from the emergence of writing (ca. 3100 BCE) down to the Hellenistic period. Among a variety of potential topics, we can delve into only a select few: the gods in their temples (the cult statue as the image of the god), the origins of the gods and the cosmos, the problem of misfortune with respect to the gods and how to account for this, how religion worked in everyday life, the development and place of monotheism, concepts of death and afterlife, divinatory techniques to ascertain the will of the gods, incantations to ward off potential evil, etc. While one does find significant differences, we will begin to see some of the broader similarities that unite these peoples in a larger common worldview. This same worldview was highly influential in shaping Jewish and later Christian thought.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- 1) Jean Bottero, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*. Trans. Teresa Fagan. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- 2) Byron E. Shafer (ed.), *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- 3) Readings on Electronic Reserves (ER) accessed via the CofC library page.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) *Mid-term Exam (20 %)*. This exam will consist of passage IDs and one essay. A study guide will be distributed prior to the exam. It is imperative that the student notify me **in advance** if he or she is unable to attend the exam. You may call me at my office (953-4996) or leave a message via phone at the Department of Religious Studies (953-0895). Make-up exams, permitted only with a valid excuse, may be of a greater degree of difficulty than those given in class.
- 2) *In-class summaries of readings (15%)*. Over the course of the term, students will prepare a brief summary for FOUR readings of their choice, to be presented to the class (3-5 minutes).
- 3) *Final Exam (25%)*. This exam and will encompass material relating to the last half of the term and will be of greater length than the midterm. As with the midterm, a study guide will be distributed for the exam.
- 4) *Research Paper (25%)*. A research paper (6-7 pages), on a topic of your choice, will be due at the end of term. Topics must be approved by me. Details regarding the paper (schedule, suggested topics, sources, bibliography, style, etc.) will be provided over the coming weeks.

5) *Attendance/Participation (15%)*. Students are required to attend class and participate in discussions. You are permitted a total of **FIVE** absences, for whatever reason, over the course of the term. Any number greater than this will result in a lowered or failing grade for the course (depending on the total number). As for reading assignments and participation in class, **I will assume that you have read the relevant materials before coming to class** and will not summarize or retell the narratives. Students should expect to be called upon to respond to questions about the readings. In addition, I may from time to time give brief writing assignments and/or announced quizzes; these will also count in my determination of your final grade.

GRADING SCALE: Final grades are determined in accordance with the following scale:

A = 100-94	C = 75-73
A- = 93-90	C- = 72-70
B+ = 89-86	D+ = 69-66
B = 85-83	D = 65-62
B- = 82-80	D- = 61-59
C+ = 79-76	F = 58-

LECTURE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Topics and dates are subject to revision. Please bring all relevant materials (along with engaged cerebral matter) to class!

I. Setting the Stage: Geography, History, Sources, and Chronology (Jan. 9-14)

Readings:

- Bottero, Religion, chaps. 1-3
- Overview of geography, history, etc
- Handouts on chronology

II. The Gods and their Temples (Jan. 16–Feb. 8)

A. The Divine Pantheon

Readings:

- Bottero, pp. 29-41, 44-71
- Silverman in RAE, pp. 5-58

B. The Temples

Readings:

- Bottero, pp. 114-125
- Assmann, “The Temple” (ER #1)
- Hornung, “Temple as Cosmos” (ER #2)

C. The Maintenance of the Gods: The Daily Cult, Cult Statue, and Calendar

Readings:

- Bottero, 125-134, 149-164
- “Washing of the Mouth” ritual texts (ER #3)
- Assmann, “Image and Cult” (ER #4)
- Robins, “Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt” (ER #5)
- Sauneron, “The Sacred Services” (ER #6)
- Daily temple ritual of Amun-Re at Karnak (ER #7)

D. Temples and Aniconism in the Hebrew Bible

Readings:

Hebrew Bible: 1 Kings 3-10
Fritz, "Temple Architecture..." (ER #8)
Niehr, "In Search of YHWH's Cult Statute..." (ER #9)
Dever, "Were There Temples in Ancient Israel...?" (ER #10)

E. Rituals of Purification and Atonement

Readings:

Hebrew Bible: Leviticus 16 (Yom Kippur)
Wright, "Azazel" (ER 311)
Wright, Hittite Parallels to the Scapegoat Ritual (ER #12)
An Atonement Ritual from Ugarit (ER #13)

III. Cosmos and Creation Mythologies (Feb. 11-25)

A. Creation

Readings (Mesopotamia):

Bottero, 72-105
Atrahasis (ER 14)
Enuma Elish (ER 15)
Story of Adapa (ER 16)

Readings (Egypt):

Lesko in RAE, pp. 88-122
Some Coffin Texts (ER 17)
The Shabaqa Stone (ER 18)
Book of the Heavenly Cow (ER 19)
Hornung, "The Concept of *Maat*" (ER 20)

Readings (Canaanite and Hebrew Bible):

Baal Cycle (ER 21)
Genesis 1-11 (with handout of other relevant biblical passages)
Habel, "Discovering Literary Sources" (ER 22)
Orlinsky, "The Plain Meaning of Genesis 1:1-3" (ER 23)
Batto's comparison (handout)

Midterm Exam - Feb. 25

B. Kingship: Religion as Politics

Readings:

Kingship in Mesopotamia (TBA)
Silverman in RAE, 58-73; Baines in RAE, 128-29, 136-37
Parkinson, "The King" (ER 24)
Divine Selection of Thutmose III (ER 25)

IV. Concepts of Death and Afterlife (Feb. 29–March 14; note Spring Break on March 3-7)

A. Ancient Egypt

Readings:

Hornung, “Body and Soul” (ER 26)
Allen, “Funerary Texts and their Meanings” (ER 27)
Te Velde, “Funerary Mythology” (ER 28)
Roth, “The Social Aspects of Death” (ER 29)
Funerary Texts (a selection) (ER 30)
Letters to the dead (ER 31)

B. Mesopotamia, the Levant, and the Hebrew Bible

Readings:

Bottero, 105-110
Scurlock, “Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought” (ER 32)
“Gilgamesh and the Netherworld” (ER 33)
Hebrew Bible: 1 Samuel 28; Isaiah 8:19-22
Lewis, “Abode of the Dead” and “Cult of the Dead” (ER 34)

V. Personal Religion/Piety (March 17-19)

A. Mesopotamia:

Readings:

Bottero, 164-170
Prayers to a Personal God (ER 35)
“Eulogy for a Woman Dead in Childbirth” (ER 36)

B. Egypt:

Readings:

Baines in RAE, 172-186
Deir el- Medina Hymns (ER 37)

VI. Monotheism in Mesopotamia and Egypt (March 21-24)

Readings

Bottero, 41-43, 55-58
Akhenaten, the “Heretic King”:
Silverman in RAE, 75-87; Baines in RAE, 186-194
Hornung, “A New Religion,” “The Pure Teaching” “The Question of Monotheism” and
“Belief in an Afterlife without an Hereafter” (ER 38)

VII. Theodicy (March 26–April 4)

Readings (Mesopotamia):

Bottero, 186-192
“The Babylonian Theodicy” (ER 39)
“Poem of the Righteous Sufferer” (*Ludlul bel Nemeqi*) (ER 40)
“To Any God” (ER 41)

Readings (Egypt):

“Dispute between a Man and his Soul” (ER 42)
Harpers’ Songs (ER 43)
Baines in RAE, 161-164

Readings (Hebrew Bible):

Job (selected portions)
Ecclesiastes

VIII. Prophecy, Divination and Magic (April 7-18)

Readings (Mesopotamia):

Bottero, 170-186, 192-202
Queries to the Sun-God Shamash (extispicy) (ER 44)
Letters from Mari (ER 45)
Neo-Assyrian Oracles (ER 46)
Spells against Lamashtu (ER 47)

Readings (Egypt):

Baines in RAE, pp. 164-172
Cerny, "Egyptian Oracles" (ER 48)
Borghouts, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Egypt" (ER 49)
A Selection of Spells (ER 50)

Readings (Hebrew Bible and later Jewish/Christian tradition)

Tarragon, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Canaan and Ancient Israel" (ER 51)
The Story of Balaam (ER # 52; plus Biblical text Numbers 22-24)

Hebrew 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)
Ephod (Exod. 28:15-30; Lev. 8:5-9)

Ancient (Coptic) Christian Magic:

Selected Spells and Curses (ER 53)

IX. God, Gods, and Goddesses in the Hebrew Bible (April 21-23)

Smith, "Myth and Mythmaking in Canaan and Ancient Israel" (ER 54)
Hurowitz, "From Storm God to Abstract Being" (ER 55)
Dever, "Asherah, Women's Cults, and 'Official Yahwism'" (ER 56)

*****Final Exam - April 25, 12:00-2:00pm*****