

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 310: SACRED TEXTS
CREATION AND COSMOS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE AND ANCIENT NEAR EAST
COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON
FALL 2013

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course we examine how those peoples of the ancient Near East (Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Canaanites, and Israelites) explained the origins of the gods (theogony), the cosmos (cosmogony), and the structure of their world (cosmology) - in short, ancient Near Eastern creation mythologies, although these deal with much more than creation itself. Our examination of these ancient cosmic conceptions will proceed initially through a reading of primary texts with some readings on their interpretation: Pyramid, Coffin and other texts from Egypt, myths from Mesopotamia (e.g., Enuma Elish, Gilgamesh, Adapa) and Canaan (Baal cycle), and biblical narrative (primarily Genesis), as well as other biblical descriptions of or allusions to the creation event or process (Psalms, Isaiah, Job). Following our consideration of these texts, we then move more seriously into matters of interpretation (with student presentations) and particular problems or issues that have plagued the scholarly examination of these traditions (e.g., the socio-political function of creation myths; the precise relationship between the ancient biblical cosmology and those of Israel's neighbors; what type of interpretive light do these non-biblical texts shed on the Bible?; addressing the timeless interpretive conundrums in the Eden narrative; does the Hebrew text itself present a consistent view of the creative event/process and Yahweh's role in it?).

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- 1) Stephanie Dalley (trans.), *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Revised edition (Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 2) Andrew George (trans.), *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Penguin Books, 1999; reprinted with minor revisions in 2003). You need the 2003 edition.
- 3) Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-historical Study of Genesis 2-3* (Eisenbrauns, 2007).
- 4) Ellen A. Robbins, *The Storyteller and the Garden of Eden* (Pickwick Publications, 2012).
- 5) Biblical text. I recommend one of the following: *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*. 4th edition (revised). Edited by Michael Coogan et al., (Oxford University Press, 2010) or the Jewish Publication Society's *TANAKH: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Hebrew Text* (Jewish Publication Society, 1985; 2d ed. 1999). The latter is also available in a study edition (*The Jewish Study Bible*, edited by Adele Berlin and Mark Zvi Brettler. Oxford University Press, 2004).

6) Readings on Oaks are accessed via your MyCharleston account. These are grouped into two sections. Part I (nos. 1-28, listed in the schedule below) contains syllabus readings for the course up to the time of presentations, while Part II (see list in separate handout) consists of readings for critical analysis and class discussion in oral presentations. In addition to the latter, we will also be reading the volumes by Mettinger (chapters 2-4 assigned for class reading and chapters 5-7 for presentations) and Robbins (chapters 3-8 for presentations).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1) *Mid-term Exam (20%)*. This exam (covering material on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan) will contain passages from primary sources (identify the text and comment on its significance), and essay questions (answering two out of three or four). 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 take the exam. You should call me at my office (953-4996) and leave a message (if I don't answer) regarding the reason for your absence. Make-up exams, permitted only with a valid excuse, may be of a greater degree of difficulty than those given in class.

2) *Oral Presentation (20%)*. Students will be given time to peruse the collection of readings on Oaks (Part II) and choose from among these for their presentation. If students fail to choose a topic, I will assign one to them. Each presentation will focus on one of these readings (i.e., what is the argument, how does the author present his/her thesis, what are its strengths/weaknesses, etc.?). A handout with guidelines for presentations will be provided, as well as a sample outline of a syllabus reading for reference. All presentations must be accompanied by an outline to be handed out to the entire class. I will be happy to go over your outline or the material in general if you get one to me in good time (**not** the day before the presentation). Following each presentation, I will call on a designated student respondent for that particular reading and then open the class to questions/comments (critical or otherwise) to initiate general discussion. If you miss your presentation without an incredibly good excuse (dead or dying), you will receive a failing grade on it. **All students are required to read the material relative to each presentation and submit intelligent and informed questions for discussion at the beginning of class.**

3) *Presentation Paper (20%)*. An expanded write-up and revision of your oral presentation, taking into account the comments and questions of other students and the professor. These will be due **ten days after** the date of your presentation. Those presenting at the end of term will be given additional time.

4) *Take-home cumulative Final (25%)*. This essay exam may encompass anything read or discussed over the course of the term, including material covered in presentations. You must turn in this exam to pass the course.

5) *Attendance/Participation (15%)*. Students are required to attend class and participate in discussions. You are permitted a total of **THREE** absences, for whatever reason, over the course of the term. Any number greater than this will affect your final grade for the course. Eight or more absences will result in withdrawal from the course. As for reading assignments and participation in class, **I will assume that you have read the texts 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 will give brief writing assignments (or unannounced quizzes if students are not keeping up with the assigned material); these will also count in my determination of your grade. **Laptops are permitted in class** for access to Oaks or taking notes, but **not** for updating your Facebook status, chatting, surfing Reddit, or other sundry online activity, for which I have no patience in the classroom. If I suspect the latter, I will ask you to close your computer. If this happens more than once, your laptop privileges will be suspended for the duration of the course.

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

Dates are subject to revision based on enrollment after withdrawal date. Please bring (or have access to) all relevant materials (along with engaged cerebral matter) to class!

I. Introduction: The Problem of Definition and Method (August 20-22)

Readings:

- L. Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth" (Oaks #1)
- R. McCutcheon, "Myth" (Oaks #2)
- A. Dundes, "Madness in Method" (Oaks #3)

II. Creation and the Cosmos in Ancient Egypt (Aug. 27–Sept. 5)

Primary Texts:

- J. Allen, "The Egyptian Universe" and "The Elements of Creation" (#4)
"The Process of Creation" and "The Means of Creation" (4a)
- E. Wente, "The Book of the Heavenly Cow" (#5)
- M. Lichtheim, "The Memphite Theology" (Shabaka Stone) (#6)
- Three Egyptian texts (Merikare, Coffin Text, spell 1130, and Book of the Dead, chap. 175) (#7)
- R. Parkinson, "The King" (#8)

Discussion:

- E. Hornung, "Origins" (#9)
- C. Zivie-Coche, "Cosmogonies, Creation and Time" (#10)
- G. Pinch, "Mythical Time Lines" (#11)

III. Creation and the Cosmos in Ancient Mesopotamia (Sept. 10-24)

Primary Texts:

- "Eridu Genesis" (#12) = ETCSL text 1.7.4 ("The Flood Story")
- "Enki and Ninmah" (#13) = ETCSL text 1.1.2
- "Atrahasis" (Dalley, *Myths*, 1-38, 338)
- "The Epic of Gilgamesh" (Standard Babylonian version, George, pp.1-100)
- "Enumah Elish" (Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, pp. 228-77; see also Lambert discussion/translation of this text in Oaks #15, pp. 17-26, 37-59)
- "Adapa" (Dalley, 182-88, plus handout of Izre'el translation)
- "Theogony of Dunnu" (Dalley, 278-81 and Lambert, "Creation Stories," pp. 33-35; *COS* 1:402-403)

Discussion:

- Dalley, *Myths*, "Introduction," pp. xv-xix.
George, *Epic*, "Introduction," pp. xii-lii
J. Bottero, "Religious Representations" (#14, esp. pp. 77-90)
W. G. Lambert, "Mesopotamian Creation Stories" (#15)
A. Seri, "The Role of Creation in Enūma eliš" (#16)
W. Horowitz, "Cosmic Geography in Accounts of Creation" (#17)
T. Jacobsen, "The Gilgamesh Epic" (#18)
T. Abusch, "The Development and Meaning of the Epic of Gilgamesh: An Interpretive Essay" (#19)

IV. Canaanite Mythology (Sept. 26–Oct. 1):

"Our King is Baal the Conqueror!": Baal's Defeat of Sea and Death

Primary Texts:

- M. Coogan and M. Smith, "Baal" (#20; note Introduction to the text)
W. Pitard, "The Binding of Yamm" (#21)

Discussion:

- Coogan and Smith, "Introduction" (#22)

*****MID-TERM EXAM - Oct. 3*****

V. Creation and Cosmos in Genesis and Beyond (Oct. 8-10, 17–24)

(NOTE: No class on October 15 - Fall Break)

Primary Texts (for Genesis 2-3, see Robbins, chap. 2 and translation on pp. 157-162):

- Genesis 1-11 (for chapters 2-3, compare Psalm 82)
Isaiah 40:12-23
Job 22:12-14
Proverbs 8:22-31
Psalms 24:1-2, 104:2-9, and 115:16-17
Exodus 20:4
Isaiah 24:17-18
Job 9:4-13, 26:5-14, and chaps. 38-41

Discussion:

- R. Oden, "Interpreting Biblical Myths" (#23)
Habel, "Discovering Literary Sources" (#24)
M. Smith, "The First Day: Questions about Genesis 1" (#25)
Mettinger, *Eden Narrative*, chapters 2-4
Firmage, "Genesis 1 and the Priestly Agenda" (#26)
W. R. Garr, "The Nouns דְמוּת [*demut*, "image"] and צֶלֶם [*selem*, "likeness"]" (#27 - selections of passages)

VI. Creation and Exodus: Yahweh's Battle with Yam/Sea (*Chaoskampf*) (Oct. 29)

Primary Texts:

- Isaiah 27:1; 43:16-21; 44:24-28; and 51:9-16
Psalms 74:12-17; 77:11-20; 89:9-14,25; 93:1-5; 104:1-9; and 106:6-12

Exodus 15

Job (review passages listed above)

Discussion:

J. Day, "Yahweh's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea" (#28)

VII. Class Presentations (to begin ca. Oct. 31). A separate schedule will be distributed in class for these after students have chosen their readings.

FINAL EXAM. The take-home final is due in my office no later than Saturday, **Dec. 7 by 3:00pm**. Exams turned in after this date will be penalized a full letter grade for each day late.