

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES 223**  
**RELIGIONS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST**  
**COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON**  
**FALL 2018**

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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 (3<sup>rd</sup> - 2<sup>d</sup> centuries BCE). Among a wealth of potential topics, we can delve into only a select few, including 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 suffering with respect to the gods and how to account for this, the development and types of “monotheism,” concepts of death and afterlife, prophets/prophecy and divinatory techniques to ascertain the will of the gods, incantations to ward off potential evil, etc. While one does find differences among peoples of this region, over the course of the term we will begin to see some of the broader similarities that allow one to speak tentatively of a larger common ancient Near Eastern religious worldview – a worldview that was highly influential in shaping much of later Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thought.

***REQUIRED TEXTS:***

- 1) Tammi J. Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*. Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011 (AMR).
- 2) Byron E. Shafer (ed.), *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1991 (RAE).
- 3) Readings on Oaks accessed via your MyCharleston account.

***COURSE REQUIREMENTS:***

- 1) *Three Exams (60% total)*. Exams will consist of short IDs (terms), passage IDs, and one essay. A study guide will be distributed prior to each exam. It is imperative that you notify me **in advance** if you are 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) *Passage Identification and Analysis (10%)*. This written assignment, part of your final exam, will be distributed in class and due on the day of the last exam (December 8).
- 3) *Weekly Reflection Cards (15%)*. Over the course of the term, you are required to turn in a total of 12 cards (starting the second week of class, one card per week). One card should cover one reading; *please number each card* to keep track of how many you’ve done. (I will not accept multiple cards in class, especially toward the end of term, to make up for missed ones.) These should consist of a thoughtful, written reflection, comment and/or question based on an assigned reading for that day or week. Your card

should refer to a *specific idea or passage* from the material so that I can see you have done the reading. The reflection or question should be written on a 3x5 card *only*, and be based on a topic or issue that you find thought-provoking or challenging, and something that would be appropriate for class discussion (given I will be discussing these in class). Cards should not simply ask for factual or extraneous information. Please leave some room on your card for me to write a response. These will be collected at the beginning of class and cannot be turned in later. I accept cards only from those who are *in class*; thus you must attend class to receive credit for your card on that day's reading. Unless otherwise stipulated, email submissions are *not* acceptable, i.e., do not send me your reflection/question and skip class. Exceptions to these policies are possible only in cases of severe illness or other grave circumstances. In each case, suitable documentation is required.

4) *Attendance/Participation (15%)*. Students are required to attend class and participate in discussion of the material. Asking questions informed by the readings and/or offering your own ideas in class is a important part of this course. Grades for class participation are determined, in large part, on the basis of the consistency of your involvement in class discussions. If you are routinely unresponsive, particularly if you are rarely in class, or it is clear you've not done the readings, this will be noted by me in my little lavender book of languid, lethargic, and listless students. You are permitted a total of **THREE** absences, for whatever reason, over the course of the term (documentation is not required for these three). Any number greater than this will result in a lowered or failing grade for the course (8 or more absences results in automatic withdrawal and failure of the course). As for reading assignments and participation in class, **I will assume that you have read the materials before coming to class and will not summarize their content.** I may give unannounced quizzes if students are not keeping up with the assigned material; these will also count in my determination of your grade. If you miss class, it is *your responsibility* to obtain notes on material covered that day (so make friends in class!). Please do not ask me via email to update you on details of what happened in class.

### ***TECHNOLOGY POLICY***

Use of laptops or other electronic equipment is not permitted in the classroom. You are required to print out and have in hand the relevant assigned reading(s) from Oaks for each class. I will announce beforehand (in class or via email) what readings will be discussed in class. *Smart phone use is strictly prohibited.* All phones should be set on silent (not vibrate) or turned off and *not on your desk*. If I see you continually staring down at your lap and smiling, I will assume you have a phone (if not, I don't want to know).

### ***DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION***

If you have a documented disability and have been approved to receive accommodations through the Center for Disability Services/SNAP (Students Needing Access Parity), please come and discuss this with me as soon as possible during my office hours or by appointment (bring documentation). Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me *at least one week* before accommodation is needed.

### ***ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES: The Center for Student Learning (CSL)***

The CSL, located on the first floor of the library, offers a wide variety of tutoring and other academic resources that support many courses offered at the College. Services include walk-in tutoring, by appointment tutoring, study strategies appointments, Peer Academic Coaching (PAC), and Supplemental Instruction (SI). All services are described on the CSL website (<http://csl.cofc.edu>) or call 843-953-5635 for information.

**GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

- 1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.
- 2) Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the humanities area under study and interpret that material in writing assignments.

The above outcomes will be assessed on Part I of the Final Exam via the Passage and Identification Analysis assignment, listed above (10% of your overall grade).

**HONOR CODE POLICY**

Please read this sheet (handed out in class) carefully, sign/date it, and return it to me in class no later than Wednesday, August 29.

**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 (August 22)**

Readings:

- AMR, chapters 1-3
- Liverani, “The Ancient Near East as a Historical Problem” and “Geography of the Ancient Near East” (Oaks #1)
- De Mieroop, “Introductory Concerns” (Oaks #2)
- Handouts (maps, chronologies, etc.; Oaks #3)

**II. The Gods and their Temples (Aug. 27–Sept. 17)**

A. The Divine Pantheons

Readings:

- AMR, pp. 51-65
- Hundley, “Here a God, There a God: An Examination of the Divine...” (Oaks #4)
- Silverman in RAE, pp. 7-58
- Glossary of Gods/Goddesses for ancient Egypt (Oaks #5)
- Glossary of Gods/Goddesses for Mesopotamia (Oaks #6)
- (See also Coogan/Smith in Oaks #35, pp. 5-8)

B. The Temples

Readings:

- AMR, pp. 66-78

Assmann, "The Temple" (#7)  
David, "The Temple Priesthood" (#8)  
Hornung, "Temple as Cosmos" (#9)

Optional:

Hundley, "Introduction to Divine Presence in Ancient Near Eastern Temples"  
and "Divine Presence: Synthesis" (#10)  
Oskar Kaelin, "Gods in Ancient Egypt" – online at  
<http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-244>

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

Readings:

*Mesopotamia:*

AMR, pp. 79-83, 103-104, and 111-113  
Berlejung, "Washing the Mouth: The Consecration of Divine Images in  
Mesopotamia" (#11)  
Walker/Dick, "The Mesopotamian *mīs pī* Ritual" (selections; #12)

*Egypt:*

Assmann, "Image and Cult" (#13)  
Robins, "Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt" (#14)  
Teeter, "Temple Cults" (#15)  
Hornung, "The Concept of *Maat*" (#16)  
Ritner, "Daily Ritual of the Temple of Amun-Re at Karnak," and David, "The  
Daily Temple Ritual" (from Abydos) (#17)

D. The Temple and Aniconism in the Hebrew Bible

Readings:

Hebrew Bible: 1 Kings 3-10; Isaiah 40:18-20, 41:6-7, 44:6-20,  
and Jeremiah 10:1-16  
Monson, "The New 'Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel" (#18)  
Dick, "Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image" (#19)  
Niehr, "In Search of YHWH's Cult Statute in the First Temple" (#20)  
Dever, "Were There Temples in Ancient Israel? The Archaeological Evidence"  
(#21)

E. Rituals of Purification and Atonement

Readings:

Hebrew Bible: Leviticus 16 (Yom Kippur)  
Wright, "Azazel" (#22)  
Wright, "Parallels to the Scapegoat Ritual" (#23)

**\*\*\*Exam #1 - Sept. 19\*\*\***

**III. Creation, Cosmos, and King (Sept. 24 – Oct. 10)**

A. Creation and Cosmos

Readings (Mesopotamia):

AMR, pp. 34-46, 105-108  
Lambert, "Myth and Myth-Making in Sumer and Akkad" (#24)

Atrahasis (#25)  
Enuma Elish (#26)  
Seri, "The Role of Creation in Enūma eliš" (#27)  
Lambert, "A Unilingual/Bilingual Account of Creation" (#28)  
" "The Founding of Eridu" (#29)  
Izre'el, The Story of Adapa (#30)

Readings (Egypt):

Lesko in RAE, pp. 88-122  
Pinch, "Mythical Time Lines" (#31)  
Some Coffin Texts (#32)  
The Shabaqa Stone (#33)  
"The Book of the Heavenly Cow" (#34)

Readings (Canaanite and Hebrew Bible):

Coogan/Smith, "Introduction" (#35)  
Coogan/Smith, "Baal" (#36)  
Genesis 1-11; Psalm 82 (with handout of other relevant biblical passages)  
Habel, "Discovering Literary Sources" (#37)  
Blenkinsopp, "Humanity: The First Phase" (#38)  
Smith, "Myth and Mythmaking in Canaan and Ancient Israel" (#39)  
Robbins, "The Snake" and "On the Characters and their Motivation" (#40)

B. Kingship: Religion as Politics

Readings:

AMR, pp. 117-125  
Silverman in RAE, 58-73  
Baines in RAE, 128-29, 136-37  
Parkinson, "The King" (#41)  
Inscriptions relating to the king (#42)  
Divine Selection of Thutmose III and Aspelta (#43)

**\*\*\*Exam #2 - October 15\*\*\***

**IV. Concepts of Death and Afterlife (Oct. 17-24)**

Readings (Egypt):

Hornung, "Body and Soul" (#44)  
Allen, "Funerary Texts and their Meanings" (#45)  
Te Velde, "Funerary Mythology" (#46)  
Roth, "The Social Aspects of Death" (#47)  
Some Egyptian Funerary Texts (#48a-b)  
Letters to the dead (#49)

Readings (Mesopotamia):

AMR, pp. 46-49 (review pp. 59-61 on Inanna/Ishtar)  
Scurlock, "Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought" (#50)  
"Inanna's Descent to the Underworld" (Sumerian version) and "The Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld" (Akkadian version) (#51)

“Gilgamesh and the Netherworld” (#52)

Readings (Hebrew Bible): 1 Samuel 28 (with handout) - add other biblical texts? Isaiah?  
Lewis, “Abode of the Dead” and “Cult of the Dead” (#53)

## V. Divination, Prophecy and Magic (Oct. 29–Nov. 12)

Readings (Mesopotamia):

AMR, 85-88; Van der Toorn, “From the Oral to the Written...Old Babylonian Prophecy” (#54)

Queries to the Sun-God Shamash (extispicy) (#55; also on-line)

Letters from Mari Prophets (#56)

Neo-Assyrian Oracles (#57; on-line)

Spells against Lamashtu (#58)

Readings (Egypt):

Baines in RAE, pp. 164-172

Cerny, “Egyptian Oracles” (#59)

Kruchten, “Oracles” (#60)

Borghouts, “Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Egypt” (#61)

A Selection of Magical Spells (#62)

**\*\*\*Nov. 5 - Fall Break\*\*\***

Readings (Hebrew Bible and later Jewish/Christian tradition)

The Story of Balaam (#63)

Hebrew Bible:

Story of Balaam (Numbers 22-24)

Dreams/Visions (Genesis 15, 37, 39-41, 46:1-4)

Teraphim (Genesis 31:19, 34-35; 1 Samuel 19:11-17; Hosea 3:4)

Urim/Thummim (Deuteronomy 33:8; Numbers 27:18-23; 1 Samuel 14:36-42; Ezra 2:62-63)

Ephod (Exodus 28:15-30; Leviticus 8:5-9)

Trial of suspected adulteress (Numbers 5:11-31)

Ancient Christian Magic (Coptic):

Selected Spells and Curses (#64)

## VI. The Problem of Suffering and Evil (Nov. 14 and 26)

Readings (Mesopotamia):

“The Babylonian Theodicy” (#65)

“The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer” (*Ludlul bel Nemeqi*) (#66)

“To Any God” (#67)

“The Dialogue of Pessimism” (#68)

**Nov. 19 - Film (TBA)**

**Nov. 21 - Thanksgiving Break**

Readings (Egypt):

“The Dialogue of a Man and his Soul” (#69)  
Harpers’ Songs (#70)  
Baines in RAE, 161-164

Readings (Hebrew Bible):

Book of Job (selected portions)  
Book of Ecclesiastes (all)

## **VII. Personal Religion and Piety (Nov. 28)**

Readings (Mesopotamia):

Prayers to a Personal God (#71)  
“Eulogy for a Woman Dead in Childbirth” (#72)

Readings (Egypt):

Baines in RAE, 172-186  
Texts from Deir el-Medina (#73)

## **VIII. The Question of Monotheism, Biblical and Otherwise (Dec. 3)**

Akhenaten, the “Heretic King”:

Silverman in RAE, 75-87; Baines in RAE, 186-194  
Some hymns to the Aten from Amarna texts (#74)  
Review Bottero (Oaks #4, pp. 41-43, 55-58)  
Smith, “Biblical Monotheism and the Structures of Divinity” (#75)  
Dijkstra, “I Have Blessed you by YHWH of Samaria and His Asherah...” (#76)

*Optional:*

Lynch, “Mapping Monotheism: Modes of Monotheistic Rhetoric in the Hebrew Bible” (#77)  
Porter, “The Anxiety of Multiplicity: Concepts of Divinity as One and Many in Ancient Assyria” (#78)

**\*\*\*Exam #3 - Saturday, December 8 @ 4:00-7:00pm\*\*\***