

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 117.01
PRE-MODERN HISTORY OF RELIGIONS: THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST
COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON
SPRING 2021

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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 3,000 years, from the Egyptian Pyramid Texts (ca. 2400 - 2100 BCE) down through the Greco-Roman period into Late Antiquity (ca. 7th century CE). 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, concepts of death and afterlife, prophets/prophecy and divinatory techniques to ascertain the will of the gods, magical spells to ward off potential evil and sickness etc., and the development and types of "monotheism." 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 world view – a world view that ultimately shaped Greco-Roman as well as later Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thought.

COURSE GOALS

In course readings, written assignments, and exams, students will (1) acquire the ability to identify and analyze primary sources (ancient texts and images) in their religious, socio-historical, and political contexts; (2) be able to distinguish between a variety of ancient literary and artistic genres and their relevance for interpretation; (3) gain an appreciation of the diversity of religious rituals and beliefs associated with various peoples of the ancient near East; and (4) understand and appreciate the various methods, assumptions, and practices that inform the academic approach to the study of religions of the ancient Near East.

GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course satisfies the student learning outcomes for the GenEd History requirement:

(1) Students demonstrate knowledge of history and awareness of the historical experience, and (2) Students situate primary historical documents in their context and use sources to construct historical arguments. These outcomes will be assessed by means of a *Primary source analysis* assignment (see below).

REQUIRED READINGS

A collection of electronic readings, available on OAKS, which enrolled students can access after they login to MyCharleston (<http://my.cofc.edu>). For convenience sake, I strongly suggest that you download these PDF files onto your laptop or a USB drive, so you do not have to access OAKS each time to find or

review a reading. OAKS does crash from time to time, especially now with everyone and their cat and dog logged on. I will announce beforehand (in class or via email) which reading(s) we will discuss in the upcoming class(es). All lectures will be accompanied by a detailed outline that you can follow in class. You should read the assignment before class, which will help you understand the material more easily and follow the lectures (and lecture outlines). In this course, we will pay close attention to primary sources (mainly texts) so, again, you should read these carefully before we discuss and “unpack” their content in class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) *Three Online Exams (60% total)*. Exams will consist of fill-in-the-blanks, passage identification of primary source texts, and one essay. A detailed study guide will be distributed prior to each exam. It is imperative that you notify me **in advance** if you are unable to take the exam during the scheduled time on Oaks. You should email me or call me prior to the exam (953-4996; leave a voice mail if I do not pick up). Make-up exams will be permitted only for those who present what I deem to be a valid excuse.

2) *Primary Source Analysis (15%)*. Due April 12. This written assignment requires a close and critical reading of a previously unseen primary source text. This text is analyzed and situated within its larger religious, socio-historical, and political contexts, as determined by comparison with class material presented over the course of the term.

3) *Weekly Reflection/Question (10%)*. Over the course of the term, you are required to submit a total of EIGHT reflections/questions on Oaks, each covering any of the readings for that particular week. Your weekly submission should respond to one Oaks reading only (mentioned in your submission) and contain (1) a thoughtful reflection on something new you have learned or that surprised you in the reading, and (2) a question based specifically on that assigned reading. Your reflection/question should refer to information in the reading to the extent that I can see you have read and reflected on its content. Submissions are worth up to 5 points each and should be no more than ca. half a page in length (150 words). I will set up weekly folders on Oaks where you can submit your reflection/question. You do not have to submit one every week. Rather, you must submit 8 of these over a period of 13 weeks (as set up on Oaks). I will not accept multiple submissions at the end of term to make up for missing earlier ones. At the end of each week, that week’s folder will no longer be available on Oaks. If you do eight of these over the course of the term, you will receive full credit (a maximum of 40 points, equal to a 100% grade). If a submission is not complete or incoherent, I will give you less than the maximum points. Conversely, if your reflections/questions are outstanding, I may give you bonus points. Unless you hear from me via email or through Oaks, you may assume that you have received the full 5 points for each submission. I also will be discussing select reflections and questions in class.

4) *Class Attendance and Participation (15%)*. **This is a hybrid class, not an online class.** The assigned classroom (RSS 137) cannot accommodate the whole class (40 students), given the social distancing requirements. Thus you will be in the classroom one day of the week, and accessing class via Zoom on the other day. Barring exceptional and prearranged circumstances, you will not be able to access the class via Zoom on those days you are scheduled to be physically in the classroom. I expect you to attend class regularly and will pass out an attendance sheet at the beginning of each class (for those in the classroom). If you miss three or more classes (in the classroom), this can affect your grade. Having said as much, the current Covid pandemic requires a flexible approach to handling student absence. You are

not required (for this term) to provide medical documentation of illness etc., as in past semesters, but you are responsible for reporting directly to me the reasons for your absences (in the classroom). Per instructions from the Provost, you are not required to share specific details about the reason for your absence. Rather, you may describe your absence as falling into one of the following categories: health-related, emergency-related, or personal-related. If you are faced with a Covid situation (whether you, a family member, or roommate) and inform me of the need to quarantine or isolate, I will be happy to work with you to come up with reasonable and appropriate (temporary) accommodations that would allow you to continue in the class. But if your condition or situation becomes more serious and/or prolonged, you may have to consider a medical or other type of withdrawal. So if you miss three or more classes (in the classroom), please get in touch with me so we can talk about your situation.

I expect each student, whether in the classroom or on Zoom, to come to class prepared, having done the readings and assignments. **Please bring (or have access to) all relevant readings in class.** Although this is primarily a lecture class, I will routinely ask you questions about the readings or an assignment and expect you, in turn, to respond and ask questions informed by the readings (whether in person or on Zoom). Whatever you get out of this course is directly related to how much you put into it. You cannot participate if you are not present (physically or online). This course presumes no previous knowledge of religion, ancient or otherwise, nor any knowledge of those religious traditions that emerged in the region (Judaism, Christianity or Islam). It should go without saying that you should be respectful of everyone in the class, regardless of background and knowledge, whether religious or otherwise.

Class (N)etiquette. Because online communication often lacks the body language and nonverbal cues we're used to in a normal face-to-face course, it is important to set some expectations for each other during this period of Covid chaos.

- Be patient – with each other and with me. Based on my experience last term, there will no doubt be occasional problems with Zoom in the classroom, and some of you also will experience your own issues in logging into a class meeting. As my life motto goes, shit happens (virtual and otherwise).
- Be kind and respectful. Treat each other with the full respect and dignity each of you deserve. Language or behavior that degrades others or any religious tradition will not be tolerated.
- Be professional. Whether online or in the classroom, this is a college course and you should act accordingly, especially when on Zoom. Please make every attempt to access class from a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, and always mute yourself, unless you are speaking to me or the class. Also, dress appropriately and be aware of your surroundings.
- **I will assume that you will have your camera on during class** (unless you provide a valid excuse for not doing so). A classroom screen full of invisible participants can be demoralizing (believe me!), since neither I nor others in the class can see how you may or may not be engaged in the class material or discussion. If class ends and you fail to leave the meeting, I will assume you were not present for class, and will count you as absent.

Technology Policy (in the classroom). Laptops are permitted in class **ONLY** for access to Oaks readings or taking notes. If I suspect other activity I will ask you to close your evil electronic device for the rest of that class period, and for subsequent classes you will be required to sit in the front row of the classroom (if you wish to continue using it). If this happens more than once, your laptop privileges will be revoked for the duration of the course. Also, smart phone use (e.g., texting) is strictly prohibited; all phones should be set on silent (not vibrate) or turned off, and completely out of view (not on your desk or within view in your book bag). If you are dealing with a family or other urgent situation where you need

to check your phone during class, please inform me of this before class begins.

Office Hours and Communication. During my posted office hours (T 12:30–3:00), I will be available to chat in my office or to talk via phone or Zoom. If you have a logistical question about the course (e.g., when is this assignment due? where can I find this reading?), you should first consult the syllabus, class emails, or Oaks before asking me. Email is my most frequent means of communication, so make sure you check yours daily. Please include “117 Class” in the subject line of all emails to me. I tend to respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays. I usually do check email on weekends, but may take longer to reply, depending on the nature of your question or concern. Also, should you wish and have time, I will be available to speak briefly with you on Zoom immediately after class.

GRADING SCALE

Letter 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 -

Honor Code and Academic Integrity. Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code, which, when suspected, are investigated. This applies also to unauthorized collaboration (working together without permission), which is a form of cheating. Unless the instructor specifies that students can work together on an assignment, quiz and/or exam, no collaboration during the completion of the assignment is permitted. Other forms of cheating include possessing or using an unauthorized study aid (e.g., accessing a phone in the classroom), copying from others' exams, fabricating data, or giving unauthorized assistance. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the student's actions appear to be due more to misunderstanding or confusion will be handled by me as the instructor. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Students. If the Honor Board determines that you have violated the code, you will receive a grade of XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator (XX) will appear on the student's transcript for two years, after which time the student may petition for it to be removed. The grade of F is permanent. If you are unfamiliar with the Honor Code or what plagiarism is, see the complete Code in the Student handbook at: <http://deanofstudents.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>

Academic Support Services: The Center for Student Learning. I encourage you to utilize the academic support services offered by the Center for Student Learning (CSL) and the Writing Lab for assistance in study strategies and essay writing consultation. The Center offers a wide variety of tutoring and other academic resources that support many courses offered at the College (including walk-in or by appointment tutoring, study strategies appointments, Peer Academic Coaching, and Supplemental Instruction). Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic careers and the services are available to you at no cost. For more information on the Center and its many services, go to the CSL website (<http://csl.cofc.edu>), or call 843.953.5635. Also,

here is a link (from UNC Chapel Hill) for help on writing an essay for Religious Studies:
<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/religious-studies/>

Universal Learning and SNAP program. I am committed to the principle of universal learning. This means that our classroom, our virtual spaces, our practices and our interactions be as inclusive as possible. Mutual respect, civility, and the ability to listen carefully are crucial to universal learning. If you are eligible for and require any type of accommodation because of a documented disability, please speak with me during the first two weeks of class so that reasonable accommodations can be made. You are responsible for notifying me at least one week before accommodation is needed, and must provide any relevant documentation. For more information on the SNAP program, see: <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu> or call 843.953.1431.

Religious Observances and Accommodation. The College of Charleston community is enriched by students of many faiths with various religious observances, practices, and beliefs. Religious observances will be accommodated. If you need to be absent for any given class for a specific observance, please notify me by the end of the second week of class so we can agree on accommodations.

LECTURE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

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

January 11 (online)

I. Setting the Stage: Geography, History, Sources, and Chronology

Readings:

- Liverani, "The Ancient Near East as a Historical Problem" (Oaks #1) and "Geography of the Ancient Near East" (Oaks #1a; note especially pp. 30-33 on Ideologies)
- De Mieroop, "Introductory Concerns" (Oaks #2)
- Handouts (maps, chronologies, etc.; Oaks #3)
- Hruša, "The Periodisation of Mesopotamian History" (Oaks #3a)

January 13 – February 8

II. The Gods and their Temples

A. The Divine Pantheons

Readings/Resources:

- Schneider, "The Gods" (Oaks #4)
- Bottero, "Religious Sentiment" (Oaks #5)
- Silverman, "Divinity and Deity in Ancient Egypt" (Oaks #6-6a)
- Glossary of Gods/Goddesses for ancient Egypt (Oaks #7)
- Kaelin, "Gods in Ancient Egypt" (online link)
- Dalley, Glossary of Deities etc. (Mesopotamia - Oaks #8)
- "Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses" (AMGG - online link)

*****Jan. 18 - No Class on Martin Luther King Day*****

B. The Temples

Readings:

- Schneider, "The Temples" (#9)
- Assmann, "The Temple" (#10)
- David, "The Temple Priesthood" (#11)
- Hundley, "Introduction to Divine Presence in Ancient Near Eastern Temples" and "Divine Presence: Synthesis" (#12)

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

Readings (Mesopotamia):

- Schneider, "Religious Personnel" and "Rituals" (Oaks #13 and 13a)
- Berlejung, "Washing the Mouth: The Consecration of Divine Images in Mesopotamia" (#14)
- Walker/Dick, "The Mesopotamian *mīs pî* Ritual" (selections; #15)

Readings (Egypt):

- Assmann, "Image and Cult" (#16)
- Teeter, "Temple Cults" (#17)
- DIGITAL KARNAK: "The Daily Ritual" (#18)
- Ritner, "Daily Ritual of the Temple of Amun-Re at Karnak," and David, "The Daily Temple Ritual" (from Abydos) (#18a)

February 3

D. The Jerusalem Temple, its Sacrificial Cult, and Aniconism (no images)

Readings:

- Hebrew Bible: 1 Kings 3-10 (on Solomon and the temple); Isaiah 40:18-20, 41:6-7, 44:6-20, and Jeremiah 10:1-16 (on making temple cult statues)
- Isserlin, "Religion" (Oaks #19)
- Fritz, "Solomon's Temple" (#20)
- Monson, "The New 'Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel" (#21)
- Niehr, "In Search of YHWH's Cult Statute in the First Temple" (#22)
- Dick, "Worshipping Idols: What Isaiah Didn't Know" (#23)

February 8

E. Rituals of Temple Purification and Yom Kippur

Readings:

- Hebrew Bible: Leviticus 16 (Yom Kippur)
- Wright, "The Scapegoat" (Azazel) and "Parallels to the Biblical Scapegoat Ritual" (#24-24a)

*****Exam #1 - February 10*****

February 15 – March 3

III. Creation, Cosmos, and the King

A. Creation and Cosmos

Readings (Mesopotamia):

Schneider, "Myths" (#25)
"Atrahasis" (Dalley translation; #26)
"Enuma Elish" (Dalley translation; #27)
Seri, "The Role of Creation in Enūma eliš" (#28)
Lambert (trans.), "A Unilingual/Bilingual Account of Creation" and
"The Founding of Eridu" (#29)
"Adapa" (Izre'el translation; #30)

Readings (Egypt):

Pinch, "Mythical Time Lines" (#31)
Allen, "Elements of Creations," "Process of Creation" etc. (#32a-b) and Three
Egyptian Texts (32c)
The Shabaqa Stone (#33)
"The Book of the Heavenly Cow" (#34)

Readings (Canaanite tradition and the Hebrew Bible):

Smith, "Myth and Mythmaking in Canaan and Ancient Israel" (#35)
Hurowitz, "From Storm God to Abstract Being" (#36)

Readings (creation in Genesis and elsewhere):

Bible: Genesis 1-11; Psalm 82 (plus handout w/ other relevant biblical texts)
Habel, "Discovering Literary Sources" (#37)
Blenkinsopp, "Humanity: The First Phase" (#38)
Robbins, "The Snake" and "On the Characters and their Motivation" (#39)

March 3

B. Kingship: Religion as Politics

Readings:

Schneider, "Kingship, Religion, and the Gods" (#40)
Silverman in Oaks #6a, pp. 58-73
Parkinson, "The King" (#41)
Inscriptions relating to the king (#42a-c)
Divine Selection of Thutmose III and Aspelta (#43)

*** **Exam #2 - March 8*****

March 10-17

IV. Concepts of Death and Afterlife in Ancient Egypt and the Hebrew Bible

Readings (Egypt):

Hornung, "Body and Soul" (#44)
Allen, "Funerary Texts and their Meanings" (#45)
Te Velde, "Funerary Mythology" (#46)
Some Egyptian Funerary Texts (#47a-b)
Letters to the Dead and to Gods (#48)

Readings (Hebrew Bible): 1 Samuel 28 (with handout)
Grabbe in Oaks #56, pp. 123-124, 141-145
Lewis, "Abode of the Dead" and "Cult of the Dead" (#49)

March 22-29

V. Divination, Prophecy and Magic

Readings (Mesopotamia):

Van der Toorn, "From the Oral to the Written...Old Babylonian Prophecy" (#50)

Queries to the Sun-God Shamash (extispicy) (#51)

Letters from Mari Prophets (#52)

Protective Spells relating to demons, sickness, childbirth, etc. (#53)

Readings (Egypt):

Kruchten, "Oracles," and Černý, "Egyptian Oracles" (#54-54a)

Dream omens and protective spells related to sickness, evil, snakes/scorpions (#55)

Readings (Hebrew Bible and later Jewish/Christian tradition)

Grabbe, "Diviners, Healers, and Others" (#56)

The Story of Balaam (#57)

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; and Ezra 2:62-63)

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

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

Jewish and Christian Incantations and other magical texts (#58)

March 31–April 12

VI. The Problem of Suffering and Evil, and Personal Religion (Nov. 14 and 26)

Readings (Mesopotamia):

"The Babylonian Theodicy"; "The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer"; "To Any God";

"The Dialogue of Pessimism"; "Dialogue between Man and his God"; "A Sufferer's Salvation"; "Eulogy for a Woman Dead in Childbirth" (#59)

Readings (Egypt):

"The Dialogue of a Man and his Soul (Ba)" (#60)

Penitential hymns from Deir el-Medina (#61)

Harpers's Songs (#62)

Readings (Hebrew Bible):

Book of Job (read Job, chapters 1-14, 19, 22-23, and 27-42; skim the rest)

Book of Ecclesiastes (all)

April 14-19

VII. Polytheism and Monotheism, Biblical and Otherwise

Readings (Egypt's Akhenaten, the "Heretic King"):

Silverman in Oaks 6a, pp. 75-87

Some hymns to the Aten from Amarna texts (#63)

(Review Bottero in Oaks #5, pp. 41-43, 55-58 on Mesopotamia)

Readings (Hebrew Bible, ancient Israel):

TBA

*****Exam #3 - Sunday, April 25 @ 3:30 - 5:00pm*****