

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 117-01 (MW 2:00-3:15)
PRE-MODERN HISTORY OF RELIGIONS: THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST
COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON
SPRING 2024

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we explore the religious beliefs and practices of peoples of the ancient Near East (including Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Canaanites, and Israelites/Judeans). Our survey covers a wide range of material, both geographically and chronologically, spanning a period of roughly 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 various types of gods and their roles, the creation of cult statues as the image of the gods in their temples (the god's "house") and the daily temple ritual, the mythological 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, and magical spells to ward off potential evil and sickness. While one does find differences in religious concepts and rituals among peoples of this region, over the course of the term we will begin to see some of the broader similarities that point to 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. This course presumes no previous knowledge of religion, ancient or otherwise, nor any knowledge of those modern religious traditions that were born in the ancient Near Eastern region (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).

COURSE GOALS

In course readings, written assignments, and exams, students will: (1) acquire the ability to identify and analyze primary sources (ancient texts, images, and artefacts) 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 religion in 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

There are no required textbooks for this course. A collection of electronic readings are available on OAKS, which enrolled students can access via their MyPortal. Since Oaks does crash from time to time, for convenience sake I strongly suggest that you download these PDF files, so you do not have to access OAKS each time to review or print out a reading. I will announce beforehand (in class and/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 (via a handout or on screen), as well as relevant illustrations and images. You should review the assigned material before class. In this course, we will pay close attention to primary sources (mainly texts, but also images) so, again, you should read or study these carefully before we discuss and “unpack” their meaning and interpretation in class. While there is a lot of material on Oaks, we will not be reading all of it to the same degree, nor will you be responsible for all of it on the exams. Often I will focus more on a few key readings on a given topic (especially primary sources) and then bring in relevant important points of analysis and interpretation from other readings on that topic. Some readings are for reference (e.g., chronologies or the various list of gods in Mesopotamia and Egypt), which you can consult for additional information. The lecture outlines and exam Study Guides contain everything you need to know from the Oaks readings, with relevant page references. As for the exams, my mantra is if it ain’t on the Study Guide, it ain’t on the exam.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) *Three in-class Exams (55% 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 in class. If at all possible, you should email me or call my office before 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 written excuse explaining the reason for missing the exam.

2) *Weekly Quizzes (20%)*. I will give weekly quizzes or short writing assignments over the readings (announced beforehand and given at the start of class). The grades on quizzes and other assignments follow a 5-point scale (with 5 as the highest possible score, although I may give a 5+ from time to time). During the course of the term I will give 12 quizzes. If you do all 12, I drop the two lowest quiz grades, so your overall average (out of possible 50 points maximum) will be based on 10 of these. If you are satisfied with your average on the first 10, then you need not take the last two. **Since I drop two grades (out of 12), if you miss a quiz or two you need not provide an excuse or ask for a make-up.** Barring exceptional circumstances, there are no make-up quizzes, although I may offer one or two extra-credit shorter assignments toward the end of term.

3) *Primary Source Analysis Paper (15%)*. Due **April 15** (in class). This written assignment requires a close and critical reading of a previously unseen primary source text. Your reading and analysis (in response to questions posed in the paper prompt) situates that ancient Near Eastern text within its larger religious, socio-historical, and/or political context, as determined by comparison with similar class material presented over the course of the term.

4) *Attendance/Participation (10%)*. In this class, in-person attendance is required (lectures are not recorded). I will pass out an attendance sheet in each class. I expect you to come to class prepared, having done the required readings and assignments (especially if there is a quiz). 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. **You are permitted a total of THREE absences, for whatever reason, over the course of the term (you need not provide documentation for these).** Barring exceptional circumstances (prolonged medically related absences, or other urgent personal or family situations), any number greater than this will result in a lowered or failing final grade; **8 or more absences will result in a failing grade for the course.** If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain notes on material covered that day or any relevant assignment due the next class (so make friends in class!). Please do not ask me via e-mail to update you on everything we talked about in class. I will, however, be happy to meet with you (during office hours or by appointment) to discuss class and summarize the salient points of lecture and/readings.

Finally, unless absolutely necessary, you should not leave the classroom during the lecture. Students constantly coming and going is disruptive and rude, especially when you walk in front of the entire class during lecture or class discussion (see CofC Student Handbook policy on conduct in the classroom, pp. 117-118).

ELECTRONICS IN THE CLASSROOM

Use of laptops or tablets are permitted in class **ONLY for access to Oaks material or taking notes.** You should print out or have access to the relevant assigned reading(s) or other material from Oaks for each class. I will announce beforehand (in class and in a follow-up email) what readings will be discussed in the upcoming class(es). **Smart phone use 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 where the cunning cyber Satan can tempt you.** If I observe you in violation of these policies – whether with phone or laptop – I will ask you to put away your phone or close your laptop. If this happens repeatedly, your laptop privileges will be revoked for the duration of the course. Multiple violations also will adversely affect your attendance/participation grade for the class. If you are dealing with an urgent family matter or other situation where you need to check your phone during class, please inform me of this beforehand.

OFFICE HOURS AND COMMUNICATION

During my posted office hours (above), 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? or where can I find that reading?), you should first consult the syllabus, class emails, or Oaks before asking me. Email is my preferred means of communication, so make sure you check yours daily. Please include “RELS 117 ” in the subject line of any email you send to me (do not send an email with no subject; chances are I will probably ignore it). I try to respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays. I normally check email on weekends, but may take longer to reply, depending on the nature of your question or concern. Also, if you have the time, you may speak with me (briefly) immediately after class.

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 (which I will not do in this class), no collaboration 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, 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 your transcript for two years, after which time you may petition to have it removed. The grade of F is permanent. If you are unfamiliar with the Honor Code or what plagiarism is, see the Student handbook at: <http://deanofstudents.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>.

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) POLICY

Intellectual honesty is vital to an academic community and for my fair evaluation of your work. Since writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all writing assignments submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the University's academic regulations. **The use of Automated Writing Tools, including ChatGPT and similar artificial intelligence tools (GAI), is strictly prohibited in this course and will be considered plagiarism and a violation of Academic Integrity as outlined in the CofC Honor Code.** Where I detect possible use of such tools, I will contact you and arrange to meet so you can explain your research and writing process behind the assignment.

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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.

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 should 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 anticipate being absent from a quiz or exam for religious observance, please notify me at least a week beforehand.

GRADING SCALE

Letter grades are determined in accordance with the following scale:

A = 100-93	C = 76-73
A- = 92-90	C- = 72-70
B+ = 89-87	D+ = 69-67
B = 86-83	D = 66-63
B- = 82-80	D- = 62-60
C+ 79-77	F = 59 -

LECTURE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Topics and dates are subject to revision.

January 10

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)
- Hrůša, "The Periodisation of Mesopotamian History" (Oaks #3)
- Handouts (maps, chronologies, etc.; Oaks #3a)

*****Jan. 15 - No Class – Martin Luther King Day*****

January 17 – February 7

II. The Gods and their Temples

A. The Divine Pantheons

Readings:

- Schneider, "The Gods" (Oaks #4)
- Bottero, "Religious Sentiment" (Oaks #5)
- Silverman, "Divinity and Deity in Ancient Egypt" (Oaks #6-6a)

Resources (Mesopotamia and Egypt):

- Hrůša, "Principal Mesopotamian Divinities" (Oaks #7)
- Dalley, Glossary of Deities etc. (Mesopotamia - Oaks #7a)
- "Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses" (AMGG - online link)
- Glossary of Gods/Goddesses for ancient Egypt (Oaks #8)
- Kaelin, "Gods in Ancient Egypt" (online link)

B. Temples, Houses for the Gods

Readings:

- Schneider, "The Temples" (Mesopotamian) (#9)
- Assmann, "The Temple" (Egypt) (#10)
- David, "The Temple Priesthood" (Egypt) (#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 5

D. The Jerusalem Temple, its Sacrificial Cult (aniconism), and Biblical Conceptions of the ancient Israelite God

Readings:

Hebrew Bible: Leviticus 1-11 (skim); 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)

Fritz, “Solomon’s Temple” (#19)

Dick, “Worshiping Idols: What Isaiah Didn’t Know” (#20)

Hurowitz, “From Storm God to Abstract Being” (#21)

February 7

E. Rituals of Temple Purification and Yom Kippur

Readings:

Hebrew Bible: Leviticus 16 (Yom Kippur)

Wright, “The Scapegoat” (Azazel) (#22)

*****Exam #1 - February 12*****

February 14 – March 11

III. Creation, Cosmos, and the King

A. Creation and Cosmos

Readings (Mesopotamia):

Schneider, “Myths” (#23)

“Atrahasis” (Dalley translation; #24)

“Enki and Ninmah” (#25)

“Enuma Elish” (Dalley translation; #26)

“A Unilingual/Bilingual Account of Creation” and “The Founding of Eridu” (#27)

“Adapa and the South Wind” (#28)

Readings (Egypt):

Pinch, "Mythical Time Lines" (#29)

Allen, "The Egyptian Universe," "The Elements of Creation," "The Process of Creation" etc. (#30a-b)

Three Egyptian Texts: Merikare, Coffin Text 1130, and Book of the Dead, spell 175 (#31)

The Shabaqa Stone (#32)

"The Book of the Heavenly Cow" (#33)

Readings (Hebrew Bible):

Bible: Genesis 1-11; Psalm 82 (plus handout with other relevant biblical texts)

Habel, "Discovering Literary Sources" (#34)

Robbins, "The Snake" and "On the Characters and their Motivation" (#35)

*****Spring Break - March 4-6*****

March 11

B. Political Religion: The King and the Gods

Readings:

Schneider, "Kingship, Religion, and the Gods" (#36)

Silverman in Oaks #6a, pp. 58-73

Parkinson, "The King" (#37)

Inscriptions relating to the king (Mesopotamia and Egypt) (#38a-c)

Divine Selection of (Egyptian kings) Thutmose III and Aspelta (#39)

*****Exam #2 - March 13*****

March 18-27

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

Readings (Egypt):

Hornung, "Body and Soul" (#40)

Allen, "Funerary Texts and their Meanings" (#41)

Te Velde, "Funerary Mythology" (#42)

Some Egyptian Funerary Texts (#43a-b)

Letters to the Dead and to Gods (#44)

Readings (Hebrew Bible):

1 Samuel 28 (with handout)

Lewis, "Abode of the Dead" and "Cult of the Dead" (#45)

April 1-8

V. Divination, Prophecy, and Magic

Readings (Mesopotamia):

Van der Toorn, "From the Oral to the Written...Old Babylonian Prophecy" (#46)

Introduction to Queries to the Sun-God Shamash (extispicy) (#47)

Queries to the Sun-God (texts) (#48)

Letters from Prophets in the city Mari (#48a, with glossary of names etc. in 48b)
Protective Spells relating to demons, sickness, miscarriage, etc. (#49)

Readings (Egypt):

Kruchten, "Oracles," and Černý, "Egyptian Oracles" (#50-50a)
Dream omens and protective spells for sickness, evil, snakes/scorpions, and beer (#51)

Readings (Hebrew Bible and later Jewish/Christian tradition):

Hebrew Bible

Dreams and Visions (Genesis 15, 37, 39-41, 46:1-4)
The Priestly Ephod (Exodus 28:15-30; Leviticus 8:5-9)
Teraphim (Genesis 31:19, 34-35; 1 Samuel 19:11-17; Hosea 3:4)
Urim and Thummim (Deuteronomy 33:8; Numbers 27:18-23; 1 Samuel 14:36-42
and Ezra 2:62-63)
Trial of suspected adulteress (Numbers 5:11-31)
Jewish and Christian Incantations and other magical texts (#52-52a)

April 10-22

VI. The Problem of Suffering and Evil, and Personal Religion

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" (#53)

Readings (Egypt):

"The Dialogue of a Man and his Soul (Ba)" (#54)
Harpers's Songs (#55)

*****April 15 - Primary Source Analysis paper due in class*****

Readings (Hebrew Bible):

Book of Job (read Job, chapters 1-14, 19, 21-23, 26-31, and 38-42; skim the rest)
Book of Ecclesiastes (all)

April 24

Summing Up. The Religious Legacy of the Ancient Near East

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*****Exam #3 (in classroom) - Monday, April 29 @ 3:30--5:30pm*****