The roots of many modern religious, literary, social, and political notions may be found in ancient Near Eastern cultures. In this course we focus on religion and literature from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syria-Palestine. Through critical analysis of ancient texts, you will learn about ancient Near Eastern deities, myths, and rituals, as well as notions of creation, cosmic order, the human condition, death, divine favor, justice, and wisdom. Throughout the course, we will discuss theories and methods that scholars have developed to interpret ancient materials and to reconstruct ancient Near Eastern religious and social customs.

Course requirements:

10% Participation in class. You should come to class prepared to answer questions, to discuss readings, and to ask thoughtful questions. Participation in class presupposes attendance.

10% Brief presentation of a topic

40% Midterm exam; Monday Oct. 21

40% Final exam; Tuesday Dec. 17, 12:00-3:00pm

We will adhere to the University’s Policy on Academic Integrity.

Books:

Ehrlich, Carl S. From an Antique Land: An Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature

Coogan, Michael D. A Reader of Ancient Near Eastern Texts

Additional primary texts and articles will be available through sakai, online, or in class.
Provisional schedule of topics and reading assignments:

Week 1
Th 9/5 **Introduction**: What is the academic study of religion? Overview of ancient Near Eastern geography and sources. Some key terms and concepts

Week 2
M 9/9 **Why/how do we compare things?**: Discussion of our methods.
Read: Martin, “Comparison” (sakai); Smith, “The End of Comparison” pp.237-241 (link on sakai); Mack, “Entertaining Another Theory”; “Toying with an Appropriate Method” pp.67-74 (links on sakai)

Th 9/12 **Defining religion, gods, and the sacred within ancient Near Eastern traditions**
Read: Ehrlich pp.1-9; Brill’s, “Religion. I. Introduction.” (library electronic access); Coogan pp.xi-7; Holland, “Religion and its Characteristic Expression” (sakai); discussion questions (sakai)

Week 3
M 9/16 **Historical Overview**
Read: Ehrlich, sections on the history and languages in each chapter pp.11-18, 77-88, 137-164, 215-224, 255-265, 313-325, 393-407; skim Coogan #24-40, #43-51; Holland, timeline (sakai)

Th 9/19 **What is Myth?; Ancient Near Eastern Gods, an overview**
Read: Brill’s, “Myth. I. Theory of Myth.” (library electronic access); McCutcheon, “Myth,” pp.190-208 (sakai)

Week 4
M 9/23 **Birth of gods and cosmic order**: Genesis; Ptah; Atum; *Enuma Elish*
Read: Genesis 1-2; Collins, “Israel” (sakai); Ehrlich pp.335-355; Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* pp.1-7 (link on sakai); discussion guide (sakai)

Th 9/26 **Birth of gods and cosmic order**, continued
Read: Coogan #1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11; Ehrlich pp.127-130, 164-170; Hymn to Atum (sakai); Lambert, “Mesopotamian Creation Stories,” pp.15-37 (sakai)

Week 5
M 9/30 **Destructive floods and the human condition**: Gilgamesh; Atrahasis; Adapa; Noah
Read: Coogan #13, 14; Ehrlich pp.46-49, 176-205, 231, 172-173; Enki and Ninmah (sakai); Adapa (sakai); discussion questions (sakai)

Th 10/3 **Destructive floods and the human condition**, continued
Read: Genesis 1-11; Lewis, “Noah and the Flood” (sakai); Lang, “Floating from Babylon to Rome” (sakai); Qur’an 11.21-11.52 (sakai); Apollodorus (sakai)
Week 6
M 10/7 Combat, hierarchy, and family relations among the gods: Marduk, Baal, Horus
Read: Coogan #1 (review), 5-6, 12; Ehrlich pp.111-119, 130-132, 265-266, 278-286; discussion guide (sakai)

Th 10/10 Kingship, Kings, and Gods
Read: discussion guide (sakai); Coogan #20; 23; selections from 1 Sam on discussion guide; Coogan #25, 27-28, 32, 34, 35, 40; Psalm 89; skim Coogan #43-51; Ehrlich pp.52-55, 93-99, 172-173, 198

Week 7
M 10/14 Death, burial, and netherworld
Read: Coogan #119-137; discussion guide (sakai); Ehrlich pp.125-127, 288, 297-298

Th 10/17 Death, burial, and netherworld; discussion of midterm
Read: Coogan #4, 5-6 (review), 7, 8; Ehrlich pp. 50-52, 61-62, 170-171, 228-231; (all on sakai) discussion guide; Ishtar’s Descent; Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince; 1 Sam 28-Samuel’s ghost; B/Gilgamesh in the Underworld

M 10/21 Midterm Exam

Weeks 8-10 The Gods in Human Affairs: Prophecy, Ritual, Legal Codes, Wisdom, Skepticism, Praise, National Lament

Th 10/24 Prophecy
Read: Coogan #169-180; Ehrlich pp.365-373

Week 9
M 10/28 Ritual

Th 10/31 Legal Codes
Read: Coogan #41-42; Middle Assyrian and Sumerian codes (sakai) Exodus 21-23; Leviticus 17-26; Deuteronomy 12-26; Ehrlich pp.355-360

Week 10
M 11/4 Wisdom and Skepticism

Th 11/7 Praise; National Lament
Read: Coogan #94-111, 22; Psalm 104; Lamentations; Psalm 74; Psalm 79; Ehrlich 55-57, 119-125, 185-198, 373-375, 62-70, 379-380
Week 11 **ANE Literary Motifs**
M 11/11 The Abandoned Child - Sargon; Moses
Read: Coogan #21; Exodus 1-3; cf. Coogan #17
and
The Childless Patriarch - Appu; Aqhat; Kirta; Abraham

Th 11/14 Sibling Rivalries: Anubis & Bata; Jacob & Esau; Cain & Abel
Read: Coogan #19; Genesis 25-33; Genesis 4; cf. Coogan #18; Ehrlich pp.114-115

Weeks 12-13 ** Debated topics**
M 11/18 **Human Sacrifice**, overview of evidence and theories

Th 11/21 **“Sacred Marriage” and “Cultic Prostitution”**
Read: Gen 38; Deut 23; Westenholz, “Tamar, Qedesa, Qadistu, and Sacred Prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia” (link on sakai); Pongratz-Leisten, “Sacred Marriage” (sakai)

M 11/25 and T 11/26 **Asherah, Israelite Goddess**
Watch: Coogan, “Yahweh’s Wives” (link on sakai) Biblical Archaeology Society lecture; his handout (link from lecture page); no class meeting due to Society of Biblical Literature conference

Th 11/28 No class-Thanksgiving Break

Week 14
M 12/2 **Visual representation of ANE gods**; student presentations of material
Read: “Visual Representations” (sakai)

Th 12/5 **Sacred texts**; student presentations of material
Read: “Sacred texts and Canonicity” (sakai)

Week 15
M 12/9 **Family religion**; student presentations of material
Read: “Religious Practices of the Individual and Family” (sakai)

Final exam: Tuesday Dec. 17, 12:00-3:00pm