

840:301:H6

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN RELIGIONS

Mon., Wed. 6:00-9:40 p.m. 7/12-8/18

Hck 205

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Office hours by appointment

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This course is an introduction to the religious world of cultures surrounding, and including, those that produced the Hebrew Bible. The regions explored will be those of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Anatolia, the Levant, Persia, and some of archaic Europe. We will consider their impact of the development of the distinctive religious life of Western Asia on the wider world.

COURSE GOALS

Understanding ancient cultures is a key to understanding ourselves. Our way of life is deeply indebted to civilizations of the ancient world. Many of the cultures explored in this course contributed lasting aspects to modern religions, although they are seldom recognized. This course will bring to the level of awareness the impact, past and present, of these religions on our own culture and that of the wider West Asian world. This course is also intended to enlighten understanding of the Hebrew Bible, itself a product of an Eastern Culture, by exploration of its cultural context. Having stated that, it must be emphatically understood that the religions of these ancient cultures are in no way considered as inferior to the religions that have developed out of modern biblical understanding. Each ancient religion is treated as a contributor to human religious development.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

As an instructor, believe it or not, I have goals for you! You have elected to sign up for a course based on material that I have spent my life studying. I teach this material because I believe in its value for the individual and society. Specifically, my hopes for you as students are that you might

1. consider and recognize the distinctive aspects of what our culture deems "religion," and appreciate how it was perceived in antiquity;
2. develop an appreciation of how religions are related and how they continue to influence our society;
3. learn what resources are available for an accurate understanding of the ancient world and approach it non-judgmentally.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Sarah Iles Johnston, ed. *Ancient Religions*, Harvard University Press, 2007 (ISBN 9780674025486).

Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 3rd ed., Paulist Press, 2006 (ISBN 9780809144358).

Students are expected to read the material concerning the regions/cultures covered in any given week.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class attendance is not optional; attendance will be taken. You are expected to attend unless you are ill or have a serious reason, such as a family emergency, for being absent. **Swine Flu Alert:** if you have flu-like symptoms, please **do not attend** class. Flu constitutes illness and is an excused absence; it will not affect your grade. Attendance includes reading the assigned material prior to class and participating in classroom discussion. The material in this course is intended to be enjoyable as well as informative.

Students are responsible for the class work covered in the event of any absence. An absence when an exam is scheduled will result in a zero for the exam unless the cause is illness (supported by a doctor's note or official supporting document), family emergency, or a legitimate religious holiday (according to University Regulation on Attendance, Book 2, 2.47B). The instructor must be notified of any religious holiday in writing by each student who wishes to have the holiday recognized as an excused absence. Assuming the instructor knows your religious tradition or what holidays you observe is not a sound premise! If an exam must be missed the instructor must be notified prior to the scheduled exam time (except in the case of being prevented by a serious illness) to avoid a zero on the exam. Make-up exams will be offered during the next class period following the scheduled exam. The student will be responsible for any material missed in class while making up the exam.

The final exam will be at the time scheduled by the University. The final exam for this class will be the first 80 minutes of that session only. The instructor reserves the right to consider a student absent from the final exam if s/he does not check in during the ten minutes of the exam. Make-ups for the final exam will be at the convenience of the instructor.

This class has a supporting Sakai page (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>) and much important information will be made available there. Students will be responsible for material that is posted on Sakai, so it is essential to make sure that access to the site is secured early in the semester.

GRADING

As an upper-level religion course, emphasis will be placed on student projects to evaluate performance in the class. Presentations are graded on whether the required information is provided to the class or not. Presentations are worth about 25 % of the course grade.

The presentations will be five brief research projects about ancient deities. The projects will be presented to the class in 5-minute presentations starting the second class period (Wednesday, July 14). Each presentation should answer the questions: what is the deity's culture/geographic region; what gender is the deity; what sphere of influence did the deity have (phenomena under her/his control); is the deity represented in any myths; were there any earlier forms of the deity? It is perfectly acceptable to include how the deity is perceived in more recent times or other relevant information.

In addition to the presentations, there will be three examinations in the course. Each exam is worth about 20 % of the course grade and will be given at the end of the scheduled class period. The first exam is **Monday 26 July**, the second is **Wednesday 4 August**. The final exam is the last day of class, **Wednesday 18 August**.

The final 15 % of the course grade is based on attendance. Attendance includes being present in class and taking part in classroom discussions. Attendance grades may be marked down for consistent lack of participation.

Grade Scale Percentages

94-100 = A
89-93 = B+
84-88 = B
78-83 = C+
70-77 = C
60-69 = D
0-59 = F

In no case will a grade be changed after final grades are posted! If you are concerned about your grade you must see the instructor about this concern before the semester is over.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS COVERED

This is a tentative schedule of topics to be covered. There may be some adjustment to the schedule as the term goes on, but the reading assigned for each session should be read for class that day. In order to encourage discussion, it is very helpful to have read the material in advance.

Session One (July 12) Definitions

What is religion?

What is the Ancient Near East?

READ: *Ancient Religions* 3-43

Session Two (July 14) Earliest Religions

Stone Age religion

Sumerian Religion

READ: *Ancient Religions* 45-70

Session Three (July 19) Mesopotamian Religions

The religions of Babylonia and Assyria

READ: *Ancient Religions* 165-72

OTP 11-32

Session Four (July 21) Mesopotamian Religions

Continue exploration of religions in Babylonia and Assyria

READ: *OTP* 33-46, 101-14, 239-57

Session Five (July 26) Mesopotamian Religions

Finish exploration of religions in Babylonia and Assyria

READ: *OTP* 329-34

FIRST EXAM

Session Six (July 28) Egyptian Religion

Religion in Egypt from the uniting of the country up to the Hellenistic era

READ: *Ancient Religions* 139-64

OTP 3-10

Session Seven (August 2) Egyptian Religions

Finish exploration of religion in Egypt

READ: *OTP* 223-38, 275-79

Session Eight (August 4) Anatolian Religion

Exploration of religion of the Hittites

READ: *Ancient Religions* 189-96

SECOND EXAM

Session Nine (August 9) Religions of Ancient Syria & Lebanon

Religions of various Syrian city-states:

Ebla, Emar, Ugarit, and Mari in particular

Who were the Phoenicians? What was their religion?

Carthage and child sacrifice

READ: *Ancient Religions* 173-80

OTP 70-86, 263-74

Session Ten (August 11) Religions of Ancient Jordan/Palestine & Iran
Religions of ancient Israel's closest neighbors: Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia
Basic introduction to Zoroastrianism
READ: *Ancient Religions* 197-205
OTP 131-33

Session Eleven (August 16) Ancient Europe
Initial exploration of Etrurian religion
Early religions of Greece
READ: *Ancient Religions* 206-32

Session Twelve (August 18) Religions of Ancient Israel
How the Bible presents Israelite religion
What archaeology reveals
READ: *Ancient Religions* 181-88
THIRD EXAM

The instructor and the University reserve the right to modify, emend, or change the syllabus (course requirements, grading policy, etc.) as the curriculum and/or program require(s). Topics covered on an individual day are subject to change. Instructor travel circumstances may also affect the course schedule.