

**840:301:01**

**ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN RELIGIONS**

MW 6:40-8:00 p.m.

Beck 111

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Office hours MW 4:20-4:50 p.m.

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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.

This class has a supporting Sakai page (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>) that is integral to the course. 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. Failure to access the material on Sakai may adversely affect your grade.

**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*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Paulist Press, 2006 (ISBN 9780809144358).

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Attendance

*Class attendance is not optional; attendance will be taken. It is difficult to overstress the importance of attendance for a healthy grade in this class. Even excessive excused absences will likely lower your grade.* The material in this course is intended to be enjoyable as well as informative.

Attendance includes reading the assigned material prior to class and participating in classroom discussion. Participations may be marked down for a lack of willingness to participate in discussion.

You are expected to attend unless you are ill or have a serious reason, such as a family emergency, for being absent. *Any absence not explained in writing to the instructor will be counted as unexcused.*

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.

Students are responsible for the class work covered in the event of any absence. Please note:

- The instructor can NOT “go over” material from a missed class. If you miss a class the missing information may be obtained by borrowing another student’s class notes.
- The instructor’s PowerPoint presentations are NOT available for copying or distribution. Multiple reasons, including copyright, prevent the copying of these presentations. Do NOT ask to have copies of the notes; they will not be provided.
- 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 (documented), 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 to avoid a zero on the exam.
- The instructor reserves the right to consider a student absent from the any exam if s/he does not check in during the first ten minutes of 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.

## GRADING

### Exams

There will be three examinations for this course. Each exam will count as 20 % of the grade (40 points each) and will be allotted the entire class period. The first examination is scheduled for **Week 5**; the second examination is scheduled for **Week 9**. The third examination is university assigned final examination, **Monday 20 December, 8:00-9:20 p.m.**

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 first ten minutes of the exam. Make-ups for the final exam will be at the convenience of the instructor.

Any incidents of cheating will be dealt with according to the university Academic Integrity policy. Any cheating on an exam will lead to a failure for that examination and may lead to university disciplinary action.

### Projects

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, as described below. Presentations are worth about 25 % (50 points) of the course grade.

The presentations will be a set of brief research projects about ancient deities that will be researched by small groups. It should be clear that the work was a group effort.

The projects will be presented to the class in 3-minute presentations starting in Week 2. 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); what other gods does the deity relate to; 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. Evidence of analysis beyond simple repetition of your sources is necessary for full credit.

Presentations will be graded on the basis of evidence of effort and critical thought, coherence, and evidence of a group effort. Being absent on a presentation day will lead to loss of points for that particular presentation. In order to receive credit for the presentation, the report must be typed up and posted on the class Wiki on Sakai. The entries should be posted alphabetically and formatted in a way that makes the report "user friendly."

The final Wiki will be a resource for everyone in the class. The Wiki version of the report must include the resources utilized for the report.

### **Attendance**

The final 15% of the grade (30 points) is based on attendance. All excused absences must be requested in writing. After the second unexcused absence 2 points will be deducted from the thirty possible points for each absence. Additionally, after the second unexcused absence 2 points will also be deducted from the presentation grade total for each absence.

If more than 3 excused absences are requested, documentation must be provided justifying any further excused absences. If no documentation is presented, 2 points will be deducted from the attendance total after 3 excused absences. Excused absences may affect your projects grade. If you have excused absences you are still expected to contact and work with your project partners.

If a serious problem arises affecting your attendance, please speak with your advisor about your options. A leave of absence or withdrawal may look better on your academic record than a poor grade based on lack of attendance.

### **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 final week of class***. Do NOT expect the instructor to offer last-minute solutions to a grade that does not meet your expectations.

### **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.

#### **Week 1 (September 1/8) Definitions**

What is religion?

What is the Ancient Near East?

READ: *Ancient Religions* 3-43

**Week 2** (September 13/15) Earliest Religions  
Stone Age religion

**Week 3** (September 20/22) Sumerian Religion  
The Religion of the Earliest ANE Civilization  
READ: *Ancient Religions* 45-70  
*OTP* 11-32

**Week 4** (September 27/29) Mesopotamian Religions  
The religions of Babylonia and Assyria  
READ: *Ancient Religions* 165-72  
*OTP* 33-46, 101-14, 239-57

**Week 5** (October 4/6) Mesopotamian Religions and First Exam  
Finish exploration of religions in Babylonia and Assyria  
READ: *OTP* 329-34

**Week 6** (October 11/13) Egyptian Religion  
Religion in Egypt from the uniting of the country up to the Hellenistic era  
READ: *Ancient Religions* 139-64  
*OTP* 3-10

**Week 7** (October 18/20) Egyptian Religions  
Continue exploration of religion in Egypt  
READ: *OTP* 223-38, 275-79

**Week 8** (October 25/27) Egyptian Religions  
Finish exploration of religion in Egypt

**Week 9** (November 1/3) Anatolian Religions and Second Exam  
Exploration of religion of the Hittites  
READ: *Ancient Religions* 189-96

**Week 10** (November 8/10) Religions of Iran  
Basic introduction to Zoroastrianism  
READ: *Ancient Religions* 197-205  
*OTP* 131-33

**Week 11** (November 15/17) Ancient Syrian Religions  
Religions of various Syrian city-states:  
Ebla, Emar, Mari, and Ugarit in particular  
READ: *Ancient Religions* 173-80  
*OTP* 70-86, 263-74

**Week 12** (November 22/29) Religions of Ancient Lebanon

Who were the Phoenicians?

What was their religion?

Carthage and child sacrifice

**Week 13** (December 1/6) Religions of Ancient Jordan/Palestine

Religions of ancient Israel's closest neighbors: Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia

The Mandaeans

The modern survival of an ancient religion

**Week 14** (December 8/13) Religions of Ancient Europe and Religions of Ancient Israel

Early religions of Greece

Initial exploration of Etrurian religion

How the Bible presents Israelite religion

What archaeology reveals

READ: *Ancient Religions* 181-88, 206-32

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.