

**840:301:H6****ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN RELIGIONS**

Mon., Wed. 6:00-9:40 p.m. 7/11-8/17

SC 119

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

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

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class attendance is not optional; attendance will be taken. Missing one session of Summer Term is the equivalent of missing more than two regular session courses. You are expected to attend unless you are ill or have a serious reason, such as a family emergency, for being absent. 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. 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) or family emergency (documented).
- The instructor must be notified of any religious holiday (according to University Regulation on Attendance, Book 2, 2.47B) in writing in advance *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.

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.

## 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 one hour for completion. The first examination is scheduled for **Wednesday July 20**; the second examination is scheduled for **Wednesday August 3**. The third examination is **Wednesday 17 August**. Exams are not cumulative.

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 and presented to the class.

The projects will be presented to the class in 5-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 research 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 first unexcused absence 3 points will be deducted from the 30 possible points for each absence. Additionally, the presentation grade total will be deducted in the case of an absence when you are scheduled to present.

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 at least one week 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 11) Definitions

What is religion?

What is the Ancient Near East?

READ: *Ancient Religions* 3-43

#### **Session Two** (July 13) Earliest Religions/Mesopotamian Religions

Stone Age religion

Sumerian Religion

READ: *Ancient Religions* 45-70

#### **Session Three** (July 18) Mesopotamian Religions

The religions of Babylonia and Assyria

READ: *Ancient Religions* 165-72

OTP 11-32

#### **Session Four** (July 20) Mesopotamian Religions

Continue exploration of religions in Babylonia and Assyria

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

FIRST EXAM

#### **Session Five** (July 25) Egyptian Religions

Religion in Egypt in the early period

READ: *OTP* 329-34

#### **Session Six** (July 27) Egyptian Religion

Religion in Egypt from Old Kingdom to New Kingdom

READ: *Ancient Religions* 139-64

OTP 3-10

#### **Session Seven** (August 1) Egyptian Religions

Finish exploration of religion in Egypt

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

**Session Eight** (August 3) Anatolian Religion

Exploration of religion of the Hittites

READ: *Ancient Religions* 189-96

SECOND EXAM

**Session Nine** (August 8) 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 10) 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 15) Ancient Europe

Initial exploration of Etrurian religion

Early religions of Greece

READ: *Ancient Religions* 206-32

**Session Twelve** (August 17) 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.