

SYLLABUS
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN RELIGIONS
SPRING 2012

Instructor: Dr. Terry A. Smith
Email: terry.smith@rutgers.edu
Phone: 908-322-5487 (office)
Office Hours: Weds: 2:30-4:00 pm,
Loree Office Bldg- Rm 132, Douglas Campus

Day/Time: MW: 5:00 pm – 6:20 pm
Location: A137, Lucy Stone Hall

Course Description and Objectives/Outcomes

This course serves as a general 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. 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. Each ancient religion is treated as a contributor to human religious development and therefore is in no way considered inferior to the religions that have developed out of modern biblical understanding. As such, we will consider their significance on the development of the distinctive religious life of Western Asia as well as their impact on the wider world. During this semester students will

- Understand the nature of Ancient Near Eastern religions and their influence on later monotheistic religions and popular beliefs systems.
- Be able to describe the religious environment of the Ancient Near East in which Hebrew religious thought and practice developed.
- Develop an appreciation of how religions are related and how they continue to influence our society.

Required Texts

Sarah Iles Johnston, ed. *Ancient Religions*, Harvard University Press, 2007. ISBN 13 978-0-674-02548-6

Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*, 3rd ed., Paulist Press, 2006. ISBN: 978-0-8091-4435-8

Supplemental Readings as posted on **Sakai**

Course Requirements

1. Class Preparation and Participation (15%)

Students are expected – besides punctuality, to be in full attendance at all sessions. *Attendance will be taken. If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.* Four absences (excused/unexcused) will result in the student's grade being lowered a full letter grade. Six or more absences will result in complete forfeiture of the student's grade. As a courtesy to your fellow students, please turn off cell phones prior to entering class. If a cell phone rings or the student is observed texting, tweeting, etc., the student in possession will be dismissed from class and assessed an absence. In order to advance our conversations, **laptop/ipad usage in class** will be limited to accessing electronic files and images that are under discussion, and taking only the most critical of notes. Checking/sending email and surfing the web during class are prohibited except under unusual circumstances and with express permission of the instructor. If your laptop/ipad usage hinders in anyway your class participation (contribution or careful listening), laptop/ipad privileges will be revoked.

Please note:

- If you miss a class, the missing information should be obtained by borrowing another student's class notes.
- An absence when an quiz or exam is scheduled will result in a zero 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. 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 any quiz or exam if s/he does not check in during the first ten minutes of the exam.

2. Quizzes and Discussion Questions (40%)

Throughout the semester there will be a series of 8 quizzes consisting of short answer, definition or fill-in-the blank. Students will be notified in advance when a quiz is scheduled for a particular class session. There are no make-up quizzes. To stimulate class discussions, each session will include a series of discussion questions. These questions will be listed under the weekly readings. Students should be prepared to response to one or two of these questions either verbally or in writing. When required written responses to a single question will be turned in at the end of the class period.

Mid-Term (20 points) and Final Exam (25 points): Both the Mid-Term and Final Exam will consist of multiple-choice questions, T/F and short answer. For the Mid-Term, students will only be responsible for material covered to this point in the semester. Similarly, only the material covered after the Mid-Term will appear on the Final-Exam.

3. Assessment

- Regular attendance and active participation in class discussions 15%
- Quizzes and Discussion Questions 40%
- Mid-Term and Final Exam, 20% and 25% respectively

Grade Scale Percentages

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

Note: This Class has a supporting Sakai page (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>) where resources and assignments have been made available. Students will be responsible for material posted on Sakai. Access to Sakai should be obtained early in the semester to avoid any missed assignment penalties.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNED READINGS

January 18th Introductions and Syllabus Review
Class Discussion: Defining Religion and the Ancient Near East

Discussion Questions:

1. What value is there in studying religions of the Ancient Near East?
2. What factors or influences do you think contribute to the earliest forms of religious expression?
3. What significant role or function do belief systems play in the organization of groups? Communities? Nations?

Assignment: Due January 23rd - In 150-200 words write a brief statement in response to the following question. If you were constructing a belief system, what elements would you include? What elements would you exclude? Why?

Your response must be uploaded to Sakai prior to the beginning of class.

For Next Week:

Read: Johnston, *Ancient Religions*, pp. 3-43

January 23rd Class Discussion: Early Forms of Religious Expression
Religion in the Ancient Near East

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the defining characteristics of Animism and Totemism? How have these cultural expressions influenced later forms of religious development?

2. Consider the insignias that accompany most sports teams. Compare and contrast the use of sports insignias with the use of Totems. What is the underlying rationale and significance of both?
3. What is cosmology and how does it differ from cosmogony? How does an understanding of the differences in the two aid our understanding of the ways in which ancient cultures conceived the world?
4. Discuss the importance of geography with respect to the different religious systems in the Ancient Near East.

January 25th Quiz

Class Discussion: Gods, Goddesses, and The Belief Systems That Support Them.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways do Polytheism, Henotheism, Monolatry and Monotheism differ?
2. Speculate on the prevalence of Polytheism in the Ancient Near East. How would you account for its prominence?
3. Discuss the difference between evolutionary and revolutionary monotheism.
4. Describe the various dimensions of the divine presence.

For Next Week

Read: Johnston, *Ancient Religions*, pp.45-70

Matthews and Benjamin, *OTP* pp. 11-32

January 30th Class Discussion: Myth and Ritual

Discussion Questions:

1. Comment on the various types of myths found in the Ancient Near East.
2. What is the cultural significance of myths and rituals?
3. In what ways do myths convey political and moral values?
4. Discuss the relevance and significance of creation myths of structuring and ordering the world?

February 1st Class Discussion: Sumerian Origins and Mythology

Discussion Questions:

1. Identify the various dimensions of the divine presence in Sumerian mythology.
2. How would you characterize the Sumerian pantheon? How do the gods appear to relate to its constituency? To what do you attribute this relationship?
3. Based on Sumerian mythology, how would you characterize the social/cultural climate in which Sumerian religion flourished?
4. Discuss the Sumerian legacy to the religious development of surrounding cultures in terms of language, literature, mythology and cosmology.

For Next Week:

Read: Johnston, *Ancient Religions* pp. 139-152 and 165-172

Matthews and Benjamin, *OTP* pp. 33-46, 101-114, 239-257

February 6th Quiz

Class Discussion: The Babylonian and Assyrian Pantheons

Discussion Questions:

1. Explain the subsequent rise of Assur and Marduk as the patron deities of Assyrian and Babylon. What political and cultural circumstances attend both?
2. Describe the relationship between humans and the gods?
3. The rise of personal religion represents an attitudinal shift in later Mesopotamian religious thought. What does this shift imply about the human-divine relationship?

February 8th Class Discussion: Myths, Rituals and Magic in Babylon and Assyria

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you classify the Babylonian Creation Myth? Cosmological, Cosmogonic, Theogonic, Hero-Epic? Combination? Explain
2. Discuss the significance of magic and divination as it relates to Mesopotamian religion. How and for what purposes were omens used?
3. Discuss the Babylonian concern with theodicy. What conclusions about suffering and justice are arrived at the end of "A Sufferer and A Friend in Babylon"? What concerns do ancient and contemporary theodicies seek to address?

For Next Week:

Read: Matthews and Benjamin, *OTP* pgs. 329-334

Jo Ann Scurlock - Article "Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought" (On Sakai)

February 13th Class Discussion: Death and the Afterlife in Mesopotamian Religion

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the significance of the portrayal of "dying gods." How were the "dying gods" connected with basic life sustaining activities.
2. Reread the story of Gilgamesh, how would you describe the Mesopotamian attitude toward death and the afterlife?

February 15th Quiz

Class Discussion: Kingship, Religion and the Gods in Mesopotamia

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the relationship between kings and the Mesopotamian deities?
2. What is the relationship between kings and Mesopotamian myths?
3. Discuss the divine presence in Babylonian and Assyrian religion.

For Next Week:

Read: Johnston, *Ancient Religions* pgs. 155-164

Matthews and Benjamin, *OTP* pgs. 3-10

Article: Stephen Quirke “Knowing Egyptian Beliefs” (On Sakai)

February 20th Class Discussion: Egypt—Land of the Gods – Power in Heaven and on Earth

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the Egyptian pantheon with respect to the divine presence.
2. Compare and contrast the Egyptian concepts of the divine presence to that of Mesopotamia.
3. How do you account for the different hierarchal structure of the gods at various cult centers?
4. Discuss the significance of creation myths for Egyptian religion.

February 22th Class Discussion: Kingship and Cult – Preserving the Universe

Discussion Questions:

1. Comment on the Egyptian conception of the universe?
2. Describe the relationship between king and cult.
3. How would you characterize the religion of Akhenaten? Polytheistic? Revolutionary or Evolutionary Monotheistic?

For Next Week:

Read: Matthews and Benjamin, *OTP* pgs. 223-238, 275-279

Article: Stephen Quirke “Surviving Death” (On Sakai)

February 27th and February 29th

Quiz – February 27th Only

Class Discussion: Magic and the Occult – Surviving Life and Death

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the Myth of Osiris and what information does it convey about death and the afterlife?
2. How do the Egyptians view the afterlife? How does one obtain the afterlife?
3. Discuss the significance of magic in Egyptian thought and practice.
4. What is the function of oracles, spells and dreams in Egyptian religion? Are they similar to or different from those used in Mesopotamian religion? If so, how?
5. Distinguish between the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead. In what way(s) do these texts capture the stratification of Egyptian

- society?
6. Comment on the purpose of magical and funeral texts?

March 5th MID-TERM EXAM

For March 7th

Read: Johnston, *Ancient Religions* pp. 189-196

March 7th Class Discussion: The Religion of the Hittites—The Land of a Thousand Gods

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the Hittite pantheon. Explain the phrase “land of a thousand gods.”
2. Discuss the practice of divination in Hittite religion. When and for what purposes was it used?
3. Compare and contrast Hittite religion with the various religions discussed thus far.
4. Comment on Hittite conceptions of death and the afterlife.

March 12th-16th Spring Break – No Classes

For March 19th

Read: Johnston, *Ancient Religions*, pp. 197-205

Matthews and Benjamin, *OTP* pp. 131-133

**March 19th Class Discussion: Zoroastrianism— The Old Religion
Zoroaster and His Teachings**

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the major religious texts of Zoroastrianism.
2. Describe the main cultic objects found in Zoroastrian worship.
Compare and contrast Zoroastrian cosmology to that of other Ancient Near Eastern religions studied thus far.
3. Discuss the ethical components of Zoroastrian religion and its relation to death and the afterlife.

March 21st Quiz

Class Discussion: Zoroastrianism under the Persians, Seleucids and Sasanians

Discussion Questions:

1. Define “apocalyptic” and its significance in the Zoroastrian worldview.
2. Comment on the role of the Saoshyant.
3. Compare and contrast Zoroastrian religion under the Persian (Achaemenian), Seleucid and Sasanian rule.
4. Compare and contrast the Zoroastrian religion to Judaism and Christianity.

For Next Week:

Read: Johnston, *Ancient Religions* pgs. 173-180

Matthews and Benjamin, *OTP* pgs. 70-86, 263-274

March 26th Class Discussion: Ancient Syrian Religions
The Baal Cycle

Discussion Questions:

1. Comment on the importance of the Mari and Ras Shamra Texts for studying ancient Syrian religious expressions.
2. Discuss the divine presence in the religions of Elba, Emar, Mari and Ugarit.
3. Describe the 4 levels of the divine world found in the Baal Cycle.
4. What views of the afterlife are found in Syrian religion?

March 28th Class Discussion: Syro-Canaanite Religion

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss ritual and sacrifice among the Ammonites, Moabites, Edom and Philistia.
2. Compare and contrast Syro-Canaanite religion with the religions studied thus far.
3. What appears to be the Syro-Canaanite attitude toward death and the afterlife.
4. Discuss Syro-Canaanite mythology and the role of the gods.

For Next Week

Read: Lupieri's Article on the Mandeans (On Sakai)

Johnston, *Ancient Religions* pgs. 181-88

April 2nd Quiz

Class Discussion: The Mandeans and Gnosticism

Discussion Questions:

1. Define Gnosticism.
2. What are the sacred texts of the Mandeans? How is the mythology and cosmology similar to or different from the religions studied thus far?
3. What are Mandaean conceptions of death and the afterlife?
4. What is the Haran Gauaita and what does it seek to explain?
5. Comment on Gnosticism in relation to Christianity, Judaism and Islam. How do the Mandeans understand the religions of these three groups?

April 4th Class Discussion: Israelite Religion

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the origins of Israelite religion. How does early Israelite religion differ from later expressions of Judaism?

2. Would you describe Israelite religion as evolutionary or revolutionary monotheism? Explain.
3. Compare and contrast Israelite religion to the religions of Mesopotamia and Egypt.
4. Discuss the divine presence in Israelite religion.

April 9th Class Discussion: The God of the Hebrew Bible

April 11th **Quiz**

Class Discussion: The Hebrew Bible and Israelite Religion

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss Israelite cosmology/cosmogony.
2. Comment on the significance of law and ethnics in the Hebrew Bible.
3. How does the Hebrew Bible deal with the issue of suffering?
4. How has the Jewish interaction with foreign empires influenced the writing and composition of the Hebrew Bible?
5. Consider the dualism of Zoroastrianism. What elements of Persian dualism are evident in Jewish religious thought? Christian religious thought?

For Next Week:

Read: Johnston, *Ancient Religions*, pp. 206-219

Article: Matthew W. Dickie, "Magic in Classical and Hellenistic Greece"
(On Sakai)

April 16th Class Discussion: Religion of Early Greece

Discussion Questions:

1. Comment on the influence of Mycenaean religion on Greek religious thought.
2. Describe the characteristics of the Greek pantheon. How do the Greeks conceive the interaction between humans and the gods?
3. Discuss the divine presence with respect to Greek religion.
4. What are the salient features of Greek mythology?

April 18th Class Discussion: Greek Gods, Heroes and Polytheism
The Greek Art of Divination and Magic

Discussion Questions:

1. Comment on the five major Greek cults.
2. Compare and contrast religion of the family/village with the religion of the Greek city-state.
3. Discuss Greek conceptions of death and the afterlife.

For April 23rd

Read: Johnston, *Ancient Religions*, pp. 220-23
Article for Roman Religion

April 23rd

Quiz

Class Discussion: Etruria and Ancient Roman Religion

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe pre-Roman Italy and the religious landscape.
2. Identify the major Roman gods/goddesses. Discuss the importation of gods and goddesses in the Roman pantheon.
3. Compare and contrast the Roman and Greek pantheons. How would you account for the similarities and differences?
4. Comment on Roman mythology.

April 25th

Class Discussion: Sacrifice, Ancestors and the Imperial Cult

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe Roman attitudes toward death and the afterlife.
2. Comment on the symbols and practices associated with the sacrificial system and ancestors.
3. Discuss the practice of divination. Who were its participants and under what conditions was it practiced.
4. Reflect on the development of the emperor worship. What led to its development? Does it subvert or support prevailing religious beliefs?

April 30th

Final Class Session: Reflections, Lingering Questions
Final Exam Review

FINAL EXAM – Date: TBD

Topics covered on an individual day are subject to change.