

Religion 840:301:01
Ancient Near Eastern Religions
Fall 2012

Professor Debra Ballentine
dsb169@rci.rutgers.edu
Loree Building, office 132

Class Meeting: T, F 12:35-1:55
Office Hours: Fridays 11:00-12:00
Ruth Adams Building 110A

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, afterlife, divine favor, 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:

15% 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.

25% Writing project and presentation. You will compose a 5 page (double spaced) essay in which you profile a particular ancient Near Eastern deity, text, or sacred space. There will be several stages of the project, including an in-class presentation and the opportunity to incorporate feedback from your classmates. More explicit instructions will be provided later in the semester.

25% Midterm exam; Tuesday, Oct. 23

35% Final exam; Thursday, Dec. 20, 8am-11am

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

Books:

Glenn S. Holland, *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East*

Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (revised and expanded 3rd edition)

Additional primary texts and articles will be available on sakai, online, or in class.

Provisional schedule of topics and reading assignments:

Week 1

T 9/4 **Introduction:** What is the academic study of religion? Overview of ancient Near Eastern geography and sources. Some key terms and concepts.

F 9/7 **Why/how do we compare things?** Discussion of our methods.

Week 2

T 9/11 **Defining religion, gods, and the sacred within ancient Near Eastern traditions**

Read: Holland pp.ix-xxx; *Brill's*, "Religion. I. Introduction." (library electronic access)

F 9/14 **Historical Overview**

Read: Holland chs. 1, 6, 11

Week 3

T 9/18 **Ancient Near Eastern Gods**

Read: Holland chs. 2, 7, 12

F 9/21 **Myth**

Read: *Brill's*, "Myth. I. Theory of Myth." (library electronic access); McCutcheon, "Myth," pp. 190-208 in *Guide to the Study of Religion* (sakai)

Week 4

T 9/25 **Birth of gods and cosmic order:** Ptah; Atum; *Enuma Elish*; Ya; Genesis

Read: OTP, 3-20, 258-260; Genesis 1-2; Lambert, W. G. "Mesopotamian Creation Stories," pp. 15-37 in *Imagining Creation* (sakai)

F 9/28 **Birth of gods and cosmic order, continued**

Week 5

T 10/2 **Destructive floods and the human condition:** Gilgamesh; Atrahasis; Adapa; Noah

Read: OTP 21-46; Genesis 1-11; Enki and Ninmah (sakai)

F 10/5 **Destructive floods and the human condition, continued**

Read: Lewis, J. P. "Noah and the Flood in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Tradition," *Biblical Archeologist* 47 (1984): 224-239 (sakai); Lang, Martin, "Floating from Babylon to Rome. Ancient Near Eastern Flood Stories in the Mediterranean World," *KASKAL* (2008): 211-232 (sakai); Qur'an 11.21-11.52 (sakai)

Week 6

T 10/9 **Combat, hierarchy, and family relations among the gods:** Marduk, Baal, Horus

Read: OTP: 263-274; 11-20 (review); The story of Isis, Osiris, and Horus (sakai)

F 10/12 **Kings and Gods**

Read: Holland chs. 3, 8, 13

Week 7

T 10/16 **Death, burial, and afterlife**

Read: Holland chs. 4, 9, 14

F 10/19 **Death, burial, and afterlife**, continued; discussion of midterm

Week 8

T 10/23 Midterm Exam

F 10/26 **The gods in human affairs**

Read: Holland chs. 5, 10, 15

Week 9

T 10/30 **Ritual**

Read: Grimes, Ronald L., "Ritual," pp 259-270 in *Guide to the Study of Religion* (sakai)

F 11/2 **Legal Codes**

Read: OTP 101-130; Exodus 21-23; Leviticus 17-26; Deuteronomy 12-26

Week 10

T 11/6 **Wisdom**

Read: OTP 283-320; Proverbs

F 11/9 **Praise; National Lament**

Read: OTP 275-279; Psalm 104; OTP: 247-255, 335-340, Lamentations; Psalm 74; Psalm 79

Week 11 **ANE Literary Motifs**

T 11/13

The Childless Patriarch - Aqhat; Kirta; Abraham

Read: OTP 70-86; Genesis 15-18:15; 21:1-21; 25:21; 30:1-24

The Abandoned Child - Sargon; Moses

Read: OTP 89-90; Exodus 1-3

F 11/16

Sibling Rivalries: Anubis & Bato; Jacob & Esau; Cain & Abel

Read: OTP 65-69; Genesis 25-33; Genesis 4

The Righteous Sufferer

Read: OTP 219-229, 239-244; Job

Week 12

T 11/20 Group discussions of writing projects

F 11/23 No class-Thanksgiving Break

Week 13

T 11/27 **Beyond the ancient Near East**

Read: Holland conclusion; Hallo, “Religion” and “The Legacy of the Ancient Near East,” pp. 212-242, 324-333 in *Origins: The Ancient Near Eastern Background of Some Modern Western Institutions* (sakai)

F 11/30 Student presentations

Week 14

T 12/4 Student presentations

F 12/7 Student presentations

Week 15

T 12/11 Review discussion: **Defining religion, gods, and the sacred within ANE traditions**

Read: Holland pp.ix-xxx

Final Exam: Thursday, Dec. 20, 8am-11am