

**Ancient Near Eastern Religions**  
**Religion 840:301:01**  
**Cross-listed 563:324:01**  
**Spring 2017**

Professor Debra Ballentine  
debra.ballentine@rutgers.edu  
Loree Building, office 132  
Office Hours: Wed 1-2pm or by appt

Class Meeting: M, Th 11:30-12:50

note: Mondays in FH-A1

note: Thursdays in FH-A5

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 Canaan. 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, divine favor, justice, 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:

- 10% 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.
- 10% Brief presentation of a topic
- 40% Midterm exam, Thursday 3/2
- 40% Final exam, **Thursday May 4, 8-11am**

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

Books:

**Ehrlich, Carl S.** *From an Antique Land: An Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature*  
**Coogan, Michael D.** *A Reader of Ancient Near Eastern Texts*

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

Provisional schedule of topics and reading assignments:

Week 1

Th 1/19 **Introduction**: What is the academic study of religion? Overview of ancient Near Eastern geography and sources. Some key terms and concepts

Week 2

M 1/23 **Why/how do we compare things?** Discussion of our methods.

Read: Martin, "Comparison" (sakai); Smith, "The End of Comparison" pp.237-241 (link on sakai); Mack, "Entertaining Another Theory"; "Toying with an Appropriate Method" pp.67-74 (links on sakai)

Th 1/26 **Defining religion, gods, and the sacred within ancient Near Eastern traditions**

Read: Ehrlich pp.1-9; *Brill's*, "Religion. I. Introduction." (library electronic access); Coogan pp.xi-7; Holland, "Religion and its Characteristic Expression" (sakai); discussion questions (sakai)

Week 3

M 1/30 **Historical Overview**

Read: Ehrlich, sections on the history and languages in each chapter pp.11-18, 77-88, 137-164, 215-224, 255-265, 313-325, 393-407; Coogan, preface and intro; skim Coogan #24-40, #43-51; Holland, timeline (sakai)

Th 2/2 What is **Myth?**; **Ancient Near Eastern Gods**, an overview

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

Week 4

M 2/6 **Birth of gods and cosmic order**: Genesis; Ptah; Atum; *Enuma Elish*

Read: Genesis 1-2; Psalm 104, Psalm 89:5-18, Psalm 74, Psalm 148; Collins, "Israel" (sakai); Ehrlich pp.335-355; Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* pp.1-7 (link on sakai); discussion guide (sakai)

Th 2/9 **Birth of gods and cosmic order**, continued

Read: Coogan #1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11; Ehrlich pp.127-130, 164-170; Hymn to Atum (sakai); Lambert, "Mesopotamian Creation Stories," pp.15-37 (sakai)

Week 5

M 2/13 **Destructive floods and the human condition**: Gilgamesh; Atrahasis; Adapa; Noah

Read: Coogan #13, 14; Ehrlich pp.46-49, 176-205, 231, 172-173; Enki and Ninmah (sakai); Adapa (sakai); discussion questions (sakai)

Th 2/16 **Destructive floods and the human condition**, continued

Read: Genesis 1-11; Lewis, "Noah and the Flood" (sakai); Lang, "Floating from Babylon to Rome" (sakai); Qur'an 11.21-11.52 (sakai); Apollodorus (sakai)

Week 6

M 2/20 **Combat, hierarchy, and family relations among the gods**: Marduk, Baal, Horus

Read: Coogan #1 (review), 5-6, 12; Ehrlich pp.111-119, 130-132, 265-266, 278-286; discussion guide (sakai)

Th 2/23 **Kingship, Kings, and Gods**

Read: discussion guide (sakai); Coogan #20; 23; selections from 1 Sam on discussion guide; Coogan #25, 27-28, 32, 34, 35, 40; Psalm 89; skim Coogan #43-51; Ehrlich pp.52-55, 93-99, 172-173, 198

Week 7

M 2/27 **Kings, Combat, and Divine Favor**, building on previous two meetings

Read: references on handout (sakai); discussion of midterm

Th 3/2 **Midterm Exam**

M 3/6 **Death, burial, and netherworld**

Read: Coogan #119-137; discussion guide (sakai); Ehrlich pp.125-127, 288, 297-298

Th 3/9 **Death, burial, and netherworld**

Read: Coogan #4, 5-6 (review), 7, 8; Ehrlich pp. 50-52, 61-62, 170-171, 228-231; (all on sakai) discussion guide; Ishtar's Descent; Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince; 1 Sam 28-Samuel's ghost; B/Gilgamesh in the Underworld

**Spring Break (3/13 and 3/16)**

Weeks 9-10 **The Gods in Human Affairs: Prophecy, Ritual, Legal Codes, Wisdom, Skepticism, Praise, National Lament**

Week 9

M 3/20 **Prophecy**

Read: Coogan #169-180; Ehrlich pp.365-373

Th 3/23 **Ritual**

Read: Grimes, Ronald L., "Ritual," pp 259-270 in *Guide to the Study of Religion* (sakai); Coogan #112-118; Ehrlich pp.191-198, 266-267, 286-288, 293-297

Week 10

**M 3/27 Legal Codes**

Read: Coogan #41-42; Middle Assyrian and Sumerian codes (sakai) Exodus 21-23; Leviticus 17-26; Deuteronomy 12-26; Ehrlich pp.355-360

Th 3/30

**Wisdom and Skepticism**

Read: Coogan #181-195; Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job; Ehrlich pp.59-61, 101-110, 132-134, 205-210, 250-251, 375-378, 380-381, 412-425

*and*

**Praise; National Lament**

Read: Coogan #94-111, 22; Psalm 104; Lamentations; Psalm 74; Psalm 79; Ehrlich 55-57, 119-125, 185-198, 373-375, 62-70, 379-380

**Week 11 ANE Literary Motifs**

M 4/3 The Abandoned Child - Sargon; Moses

Read: Coogan #21; Exodus 1-3; cf. Coogan #17

*and*

The Childless Patriarch - Appu; Aqhat; Kirta; Abraham

Read: Coogan #15-16, 18; Genesis 15-18:15; 21:1-21; 25:21; 30:1-24; Ehrlich pp.289-293

Th 4/6 Sibling Rivalries: Anubis & Bata; Jacob & Esau; Cain & Abel

Read: Coogan #19; Genesis 25-33; Genesis 4; cf. Coogan #18; Ehrlich pp.114-115

**Weeks 12-13 Debated topics**

M 4/10 **Human Sacrifice**, overview of evidence and theories

Read: Exod 13:1-2, 11-16; 22:28-30; 34:19-20; Num 3:11-13, 41; Deut 15:19-20; 21:15-17; Exod 4:24-26; Lev 20:2-5; 18:21; 1 Kgs 11:7; Judges 11:31; 2 Kgs 3:27; 23:10, 20; Deut 12:31; 18:10-13; Isa 30:33; Jer 7:31; 19:5; 32:35; Micah 6:6-8; Ezek 20:25-26, 30-31; Gen 22; Stavrakopoulou, chaps. 4-5 on child sacrifice (sakai)

Th 4/13 **“Sacred Marriage” and “Cultic Prostitution”**

Read: Gen 38; Deut 23; Westenholz, “Tamar, Qedesa, Qadistu, and Sacred Prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia” (link on sakai); Pongratz-Leisten, “Sacred Marriage” (sakai); Ehrlich 61-62

M 4/17 **Asherah, Israelite Goddess**

Watch: Coogan, “Yahweh’s Wives” (link on sakai) Biblical Archaeology Society lecture; his handout (link from lecture page)

**Student Presentations of Remaining topics**

Th 4/20 **Visual representation of ANE gods**; student presentations of material

Read: "Visual Representations" (sakai)

Week 14

M 4/24 **Sacred texts**; student presentations of material

Read: "Sacred texts and Canonicity" (sakai)

Th 4/27 **Family religion**; student presentations of material

Read: "Religious Practices of the Individual and Family" (sakai)

Week 15

M 5/1 Conclusions and Review for Final Exam

Th 5/4 Final Exam 8-11am