

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES 223**  
**RELIGIONS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST**  
**COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON**  
**SPRING 2015**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

In this course we explore the religious beliefs and practices of those peoples of the ancient Near East (including Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Canaanites, and Israelites). Our examination covers a wide range of material, both geographically and chronologically, spanning a period of nearly 3,000 years, from the emergence of writing (ca. 3100 BCE) down to the Hellenistic period (3<sup>rd</sup> - 2<sup>d</sup> centuries BCE). Among a wealth of potential topics, we can delve into only a select few: the gods in their temples (the cult statue as the image of the god), the origins of the gods and the cosmos, the problem of suffering with respect to the gods and how to account for this, the development and place of monotheism, concepts of death and afterlife, divinatory techniques to ascertain the will of the gods, incantations to ward off potential evil, etc. While one does find significant differences among peoples of this region, over the course of the term we will begin to see some of the broader similarities that allow one to speak tentatively of a larger common ancient Near Eastern world view – a world view that was highly influential in shaping much of later Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thought.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

- 1) Tammi J. Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*. Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011 (AMR).
- 2) Byron E. Shafer (ed.), *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1991 (RAE).
- 3) Readings on Oaks accessed via your MyCharleston account.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

1) *Three Exams (70% total)*. Exams will consist of short ID, passage ID, and one essay. A study guide will be distributed prior to each exam. It is imperative that you notify me **in advance** if you are unable to attend the exam. You may call me at my office (953-4996) or leave a message via phone at the Department of Religious Studies (953-0895). Make-up exams, permitted only with a valid excuse, may be of a greater degree of difficulty than those given in class.

2) *Reflection Cards (10%)*. Over the course of the term, you are required to turn in a total of twelve reflection cards (one per week, each Tuesday, starting the second week of class, and excluding the last week). These consist of a thoughtful, written reflection or question based on one of the assigned readings for that week. Your reflection, comment and/or question should refer to a *specific idea or passage* from the assigned material (provide page numbers!) and/or be based on a topic or issue that you find thought-provoking or challenging (so that I can see you have done the reading), and something that would be appropriate for class discussion. (Cards should not simply ask for factual or extraneous information.) Reflections should be written on a 3x5 card *only* (I will provide a few of these to get you

started). These will be collected at the beginning of Tuesday's class and cannot be turned in later. I accept cards only from those who are *in class*; also, unless otherwise stipulated, email submissions are *not acceptable*, i.e., do not send me your reflection cards and skip class. Exceptions to these policies are possible only in cases of documented illness or other grave circumstances.

3) *Passage Identification and Analysis (5%)*. This written assignment will be distributed in class and due on the day of the last exam (April 30).

4) *Attendance/Participation (15%)*. Students are required to attend class and participate in discussions. Whatever you get out of this course is directly related to how much you put into it. Asking questions, raising concerns, and offering your own ideas in class is a crucial part of this course. You are expected to be an active and informed participant in class discussions. Grades for class participation will be assigned on the basis of the quality and consistency of your involvement in class discussions. You are permitted a total of **THREE** absences, for whatever reason, over the course of the term (you need not provide documentation for these). Any number greater than this will result in a lowered or failing grade (8 or more absences) for the course. As for reading assignments and participation in class, **I will assume that you have read the materials before coming to class and will not summarize their content**. I may give unannounced quizzes if students are not keeping up with the assigned material; these will also count in my determination of your grade.

#### **GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

- 1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.
- 2) Students examine relevant primary source materials, as understood by the discipline, and interpret these materials in writing assignments.

The above outcomes will be assessed by means of a written assignment (passage identification and analysis; see above).

**GRADING SCALE:** Final grades are determined in accordance with the following scale:

|            |            |
|------------|------------|
| A = 100-94 | C = 75-73  |
| A- = 93-90 | C- = 72-70 |
| B+ = 89-86 | D+ = 69-66 |
| B = 85-83  | D = 65-62  |
| B- = 82-80 | D- = 61-59 |
| C+ = 79-76 | F = 58-    |

#### **LECTURE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

*Topics and dates are subject to revision.* Please bring all relevant materials (along with engaged cerebral matter) to class!

#### **I. Setting the Stage: Geography, History, Sources, and Chronology (Jan. 13 )**

Readings:

AMR, chapters 1-3

Liverani, "The Ancient Near East as a Historical Problem" and "Geography of the Ancient Near East" (Oaks #1)

De Mieroop, "Introductory Concerns" (Oaks #2)

Handouts (maps, chronologies, etc.; Oaks #3)

## II. The Gods and their Temples (Jan. 15–Feb. 10)

### A. The Divine Pantheons

#### Readings:

- AMR, pp. 51-65
- Bottero, “Religious Sentiment” (Oaks #4)
- Silverman in RAE, pp. 7-58
- Glossary of Gods/Goddesses for ancient Egypt (Oaks #5)
- Glossary of Gods/Goddesses for Mesopotamia (Oaks #6)
- (See also Coogan/Smith in Oaks #35, pp. 5-8.)

### B. The Temples

#### Readings:

- AMR, pp. 66-78
- Assmann, “The Temple” (#7)
- David, “The Temple Priesthood” (#8)
- Hornung, “Temple as Cosmos” (#9)

#### Optional:

- Hundley, “Introduction to Divine Presence in Ancient Near Eastern Temples” and “Divine Presence: Synthesis” (#10)

### C. The Maintenance of the Gods: The Daily Cult, Cult Statue, and Calendar

#### Readings:

##### *Mesopotamia:*

- AMR, pp. 79-83, 103-104, and 111-113
- Berlejung, “Washing the Mouth: The Consecration of Divine Images in Mesopotamia” (#11)
- Walker/Dick, “The Mesopotamian *mīs pi* Ritual” (selections; #12)

##### *Egypt:*

- Assmann, “Image and Cult” (#13)
- Robins, “Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt” (#14)
- Teeter, “Temple Cults” (#15)
- Hornung, “The Concept of *Maat*” (#16)
- Ritner, “Daily Ritual of the Temple of Amun-Re at Karnak,” and David, “The Daily Temple Ritual” (from Abydos) (#17)

### D. The Temple and Aniconism in the Hebrew Bible

#### Readings:

- Hebrew Bible: 1 Kings 3-10; Isaiah 40:18-20, 41:6-7, 44:6-20, and Jeremiah 10:1-16
- Monson, “The New ‘Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel” (#18)
- Dick, “Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image” (#19)
- Niehr, “In Search of YHWH’s Cult Statute in the First Temple” (#20)
- Dever, “Were There Temples in Ancient Israel? The Archaeological Evidence” (#21)

### E. Rituals of Purification and Atonement

#### Readings:

- Hebrew Bible: Leviticus 16 (Yom Kippur)

Wright, "Azazel" (#22)  
Wright, "Parallels to the Scapegoat Ritual" (#23)

**\*\*\*Exam #1 - Feb. 12\*\*\***

### **III. Creation, Cosmos, and King (Feb. 12 – March 17)**

#### A. Creation and Cosmos

##### Readings (Mesopotamia):

AMR, pp. 34-46, 105-108  
Lambert, "Myth and Myth-Making in Sumer and Akkad" (#24)  
Atrahasis (#25)  
Enuma Elish (#26)  
Seri, "The Role of Creation in Enūma eliš" (#27)  
Lambert, "A Unilingual/Bilingual Account of Creation" (#28)  
" "The Founding of Eridu" (#29)  
Izre'el, The Story of Adapa (#30)

##### Readings (Egypt):

Lesko in RAE, pp. 88-122  
Pinch, "Mythical Time Lines" (#31)  
Some Coffin Texts (#32)  
The Shabaqa Stone (#33)  
"The Book of the Heavenly Cow" (#34)

##### Readings (Canaanite and Hebrew Bible):

Coogan/Smith, "Introduction" (#35)  
Coogan/Smith, "Baal" (#36)  
Genesis 1-11 (For chaps. 2-3, compare Psalm 82. For other biblical texts relating to the structure of the cosmos, see Isaiah 40:12-23, Job 22:12-14, Psalms 24:1-2, 104:1-9, 115:16-17, Job 26:5-14, and Proverbs 8:22-31. For other accounts of creation with God's defeat of the chaos waters, see Isaiah 51:9-16, Psalms 74:12-17, 77:11-20, 89:5-15, 10.)  
Habel, "Discovering Literary Sources" (#37)  
Blenkinsopp, "Humanity: The First Phase" (#38)  
Smith, "Myth and Mythmaking in Canaan and Ancient Israel" (#39)  
Robbins, "The Snake" and "On the Characters and their Motivation" (#40)

**\*\*\*Spring Break – March 3-5\*\*\***

#### B. Kingship: Religion as Politics

##### Readings:

AMR, pp. 117-125  
Some Mesopotamian Royal Inscriptions (#41)  
Silverman in RAE, 58-73  
Baines in RAE, 128-29, 136-37  
Parkinson, "The King" (#42)  
Divine Selection of Thutmose III and Aspelta (#43)

**\*\*\*Exam #2 - March 17\*\*\***

**IV. Concepts of Death and Afterlife (March 19-26)**

Readings (Egypt)::

- Hornung, "Body and Soul" (#44)
- Allen, "Funerary Texts and their Meanings" (#45)
- Te Velde, "Funerary Mythology" (#46)
- Roth, "The Social Aspects of Death" (#47)
- Some Egyptian Funerary Texts (#48)
- Letters to the dead (#49)

Readings (Mesopotamia):

- AMR, pp. 46-49 (review pp. 59-61 on Inanna/Ishtar)
- Scurlock, "Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought" (#50)
- "Inanna's Descent to the Underworld" (Sumerian version) and "The Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld" (Akkadian version) (#51)
- "Gilgamesh and the Netherworld" (#52)
- Hebrew Bible: 1 Samuel 28 (with handout)
- Lewis, "Abode of the Dead" and "Cult of the Dead" (#53)

**V. Divination, Prophecy and Magic (March 31--April 9)**

Readings (Mesopotamia):

- AMR, 85-88; Van der Toorn, "Mesopotamian Prophecy" (#54)
- Queries to the Sun-God Shamash (extispicy) (#55; also on-line)
- Letters from Mari Prophets (#56)
- Neo-Assyrian Oracles (#57; on-line)
- Spells against Lamashtu (#58)

Readings (Egypt):

- Baines in RAE, pp. 164-172
- Cerny, "Egyptian Oracles" (#59)
- Kruchten, "Oracles" (#60)
- Borghouts, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Egypt" (#61)
- A Selection of Magical Spells (#62)

Readings (Hebrew Bible and later Jewish/Christian tradition)

- The Story of Balaam (#63)
- Hebrew Bible:
  - Story of Balaam (Numbers 22-24)
  - Dreams/Visions (Genesis 15, 37, 39-41, 46:1-4)
  - Teraphim (Genesis 31:19, 34-35; 1 Samuel 19:11-17; Hosea 3:4)
  - Urim/Thummim (Deuteronomy 33:8; Numbers 27:18-23; 1 Samuel 14:36-42; Ezra 2:62-63)
  - Ephod (Exodus 28:15-30; Leviticus 8:5-9)
  - Trial of suspected adulteress (Numbers 5:11-31)

Ancient Christian Magic (Coptic):

Selected Spells and Curses (#64)

**VI. The Problem of Suffering and Evil (April 14-16)**

Readings (Mesopotamia):

“The Babylonian Theodicy” (#65)

“The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer” (*Ludlul bel Nemeqi*) (#66)

“To Any God” (#67)

“The Dialogue of Pessimism” (#68)

Readings (Egypt):

“The Dialogue of a Man and his Soul” (#69)

Harpers’ Songs (#70)

Baines in RAE, 161-164

Readings (Hebrew Bible):

Book of Job (selected portions)

Book of Ecclesiastes (all)

**VII. Personal Religion and Piety (April 21)**

Readings (Mesopotamia):

Prayers to a Personal God (#71)

“Eulogy for a Woman Dead in Childbirth” (#72)

Readings (Egypt):

Baines in RAE, 172-186

Texts from Deir el-Medina (#73)

**VIII. The Question of Monotheism, Biblical and Otherwise (April 23)**

Akhenaten, the “Heretic King”:

Silverman in RAE, 75-87; Baines in RAE, 186-194

Amarna texts (#74)

Review Bottero (Oaks #4, pp. 41-43, 55-58)

Smith, “Biblical Monotheism and the Structures of Divinity” (#75)

Dijkstra, “I Have Blessed you by YHWH of Samaria and His Asherah...” (#76)

*Optional:*

Lynch, “Mapping Monotheism: Modes of Monotheistic Rhetoric in the Hebrew Bible” (#77)

Porter, “The Anxiety of Multiplicity: Concepts of Divinity as One and Many in Ancient Assyria” (#78)

**\*\*\*Exam #3 - April 30, 12:00-2:00pm\*\*\***

Here are some web sites I'll be directing you to in class.

1) Digital Karnak

<http://dlib.etc.ucla.edu/projects/Karnak/>

2) The Karnak Great Hypostyle Hall Project (The University of Memphis)

<http://memphis.edu/hypostyle/index.htm>

3) The Oracc Project List

<http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/projectlist.html>

4) Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses:

<http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/index.html>

5) Knowledge and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire:

<http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/knpp/>

There are four main groups of religious literature from the ancient Near East which are of particular importance for the light they throw on the origin and background of Hebrew religion: Egyptian, Mesopotamian (Sumero-Accadian), Hittite, and West Semitic (Canaanite, Aramaean, South Arabian). In. 3 Cf. the general discussion of the progress and present state of Near-Eastern studies in Jour. Am. Or.Soc., LVI, 121-144. Albright: the near east and israel. 87. publication of detailed documentation for the words listed in.