AROL 231
Ancient Near Eastern Religions
Syllabus

Instructor Information
Professor Helen Sader
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College Hall, room 436
Office hours: T:10:00-11:00; W 10:00-11:00
Phone: 4183

Course Information

Course description
A study of ancient Mesopotamian, Canaanite, and biblical religious texts, with emphasis on creation myths, divine beings, cults and rituals, death and the afterlife. This course also includes a complementary investigation of archaeological evidence for religious beliefs and practices.

General Instructional Objective/Goal
Students will understand the nature of ancient near eastern religion and their influence on later monotheistic religions and popular beliefs.

Specific Learning Outcomes
Students will be able:

1. To describe the written records and the archaeological evidence (religious architecture, iconography, funerary and ritual structures and objects…) related to the religions of ancient Mesopotamia, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine.
2. to identify the ancient Near Eastern myths explaining the creation of the universe (cosmogony), the origin and nature of divine beings (theogony) and their symbols, the creation of man (anthropogony), as well as death and life after death (eschatology).
3. to evaluate the influence ancient Near Eastern religious traditions had on the development of monotheistic beliefs and how they survive as superstitions, festivals, and popular practices in modern Middle East societies.
4. to show critical awareness of the use and misuse of religion, to reflect on its origins, on the diversified perceptions of the sacred, on the tolerant character of polytheism versus the intolerance of monotheism.
Location: Post Hall 207

Meeting day(s): MWF at 11:00

Pre-requisites

None

Policies

Class attendance is required and students are expected to be on time for the class. Make-up exams will be given only to students with a valid excuse. For definitions of cheating and plagiarism as well as the consequences for such, see the AUB “Student Code of Conduct” in the Student Handbook.

Grading Criteria

Your grade in this course will be calculated based on attendance and active class participation (10%), midterm examination (20%), class assignments (20%), and final examination (50%).

Textbook

There is no English textbook for the course.

Selected readings will be chosen from the following:


Keel, O. and Uhlinger, C. 1998
*Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, Minneapolis.


**Schedule**

**Week 1**
The Area and the People
Definition and origin of religion
Sources for the study of ancient religions.

*Reading assignment:*

**Week 2**
The Creation of the Universe or Cosmogony
- The Sumerian Origins
- The Baylonian Epic of Creation or *enuma elish*
- The New Year or *akitu* festival

*Reading assignment:*

**Week 3**
Canaanite Cosmogonies:
- Ugarit: The Baal Cycle
- Philo of Byblos’ *Phoenician History*
- The Biblical Creation Accounts

*Reading assignment*
Attridge, H. and Oden, R.  
Genesis 1 and 2

**Class presentation:**  
Spring festival in Buarij (EL JIZ-YORDANOV)  
Reference:  
A. Fuller 1961  

**Week 4**  
Ancient Near Eastern Gods  
- The Creation of the Gods in Mesopotamia  
- The Creation of the Gods in Canaan  
- The Nature and Representation of ANE Gods

**Week 5**  
The Pantheon or Assembly of the Gods  
- Mesopotamian pantheon  
- Ugaritic pantheon

**Reading assignment:**  

**Week 6**  
- Phoenician Pantheon  
- Aramaic Pantheon

**Class presentation:**  
1- The Late Bronze and Early Iron Age So-Called Astarte plaques  
Reference:  
Kehl, O. and Uhlinger, C.1998  

2- Yahweh and his Asherah (ALI HASHEM- FEGHALI, J.)  
Reference:  
Kehl, O. and Uhlinger, C.1998  
*Gods and Goddesses and Images of Gods* par.129 ff. “Kuntillet Ajrud, Khirbet el Qom and Yahweh’s Asherah”  
W. Dever 2005  
*Did God have a Wife?* Chapters 6 and 7.
3-The myth of Adonis (ABBANI AND DEBS)
Reference
Ribichini, S.
Adonis: aspetti orientali di un mito greco, Roma : Consiglio nazionale delle ricerche, 1981
Dib, L. 2007
The dying and rising God in Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and the Phoenician cities. M.A. thesis

WEEK 7
Review for the midterm

March 24, 2010 MIDTERM EXAM

Week 8
The Worship of the Gods:
  • The Temple
  • The Temple Personnel

Class presentation:
1-The Mesopotamian Ziqqurat (MOURANI AND DIB)
Reference
Crawford, H. 2004
Sumer and the Sumerians, 85-88

2-The temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem (SLEEM-AKL)
Reference
Stager, L. and King, P. 2001
Life in Biblical Israel, p. 330-336
Keel, O. and Uhlinger, C. 1998
Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel, Minneapolis, 167-175.

  3- The Mesopotamian Cult Statue (BEALL)

Week 9
  • The Cult: sacrifices, prayers…
  • Magic, exorcism, divination

Class presentation:
1- Lamashtu, Lilith and their modern counterpart: the Qrini (DAKROUB-McCARTHY)
Reference
K. Van der Toorn, B. Becking, P. W. van der Horst 1995
Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, Brill

2- Tell Taanach Cult Stand *(GERGES-RIZK)*
Reference
Kehl, O. and Uhlinger, C.1998
*Gods and Goddesses and Images of Gods* par. 96ff. “The Iconography of the Cultic Stands from Taanach and Other Terra-Cotta Image-Bearing Artifacts”.
Stager, L. and King, P. 2001
*Life in Biblical Israel*, p. 340-344

3- Sacred prostitution *(ANTOUN-ROUHBAN)*
Reference
S. L. Budin 2008
The myth of sacred prostitution in antiquity
Leick, G. 1994
Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature, Chap. 13: “L’amour libre or Sacred Prostitution”?

4-Evil eye and modern incantations *(NAFFAH-)*

**Week 10**
The Creation of Man
  - Mesopotamian Traditions
  - Biblical Traditions

*Reading assignment:*
The Story of the Flood
The Myth of Atrahasis
in
Genesis 1 and 2

**Week 11**
Death and Life after Death
  - Mesopotamian view of the Afterlife
  - Canaanite and Aramaic view of life after death
  - Biblical view

*Reading assignments:*
The Epic of Gilgamesh
The Myth of Etana
Ishtar’s Descent to the Underworld

**Class Presentation:**
*The Epic of Gilgamesh (WARAKIAN-YAACOUB)*

Reference

**Week 12**
Funerary Rituals and Burial Customs
- Mesopotamia

**Week 13**
Funerary Rituals and Burial Customs:
- Canaan

**Week 14**
Retrospective and Conclusion

**On Class Presentations**

Choose one topic and submit your choice in writing to hsader@aub.edu.lb.
You can work alone or in groups of two.
No excuses will be accepted for delaying paper submission. Start NOW.
Research should not use exclusively internet sources. You should use scientific publications in books and refereed journals given under each heading.
A detailed outline of the presentation should be submitted to the instructor for approval two weeks before the presentation date. If this deadline is not respected the student will not be allowed to make the presentation and will receive a grade of 0 on the assignment.
Any student who does not show up on the scheduled day of the presentation will have a grade of 0 on the assignment.
Class presentations should not exceed 20 mns.
All papers should be presented orally in class and then submitted in writing with footnotes, illustrations and bibliography.