

AROL 231
Ancient Near Eastern Religions
Syllabus

Instructor Information

Professor Helen Sader

hsader@aub.edu.lb

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:

Attridge, H. and Oden, R. *Philo of Byblos. The Phoenician History*. Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 9. (Reserve).

Bidmead, J. 2004, *The Akītu Festival. Religious Continuity and Royal Legitimation in Mesopotamia*, Gorgias Press.

Black, J. and Green, A. 1992. *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*. London: British Museum Press. (Reference Room)

Caquot, A. & Sznycer, M. 1980. *Ugaritic Religion*. Leiden: Brill. (Reserve)

Dalley, S. 1989. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Reserve).

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

Leick, G. 1991. *A Dictionary of Ancient Near Eastern Mythology*. London: Routledge. (Reserve)

McCall, H. 1990. *Mesopotamian Myths*. London: British Museum Publications. (Reserve)

Smith, M. 2001. *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Walewska, E. 2000. *Creation Stories of the Middle East*. London and Philadelphia. Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd.

Wyatt, N. 1999. The religion of Ugarit: An Overview. In Watson, W. and Wyatt, N. eds. *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*. Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill. (Reserve)

Schedule

Week 1

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

Reading assignment:

McCall, H. 1990. *Mesopotamian Myths*. London: British Museum Publications. Chapters 1 and 2

Week 2

The Creation of the Universe or Cosmogony

- The Sumerian Origins
- The Babylonian Epic of Creation or *enuma elish*
- The New Year or *akitu* festival

Reading assignment:

Walewska, E. 2000. *Creation Stories of the Middle East*. London and Philadelphia. Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd. Chapt.5
Dalley, S. 1989.

Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McCall, H. 1990. *Mesopotamian Myths*. London: British Museum Publications.

Week 3

Canaanite Cosmogonies:

- Ugarit: The Baal Cycle
- Philo of Byblos' *Phoenician History*
- The Biblical Creation Accounts

Reading assignment

Wyatt, N. 1999.
The Religion of Ugarit: An Overview. In Watson, W. and Wyatt, N. eds. *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*. Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill. Chapter 13

Attridge, H. and Oden, R.

Philo of Byblos. The Phoenician History. Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 9. P.1-9, 37-53

Genesis 1 and 2

Class presentation:

Spring festival in Buarj (**EL JIZ-YORDANOV**)

Reference:

A. Fuller 1961

Buarj. Portrait of a Lebanese Muslim Village, Cambridge.

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:

Black, J. and Green, A. 1992. *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia.*

London: British Museum Press.

Smith, M. 2001. *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 6: The Life and Death of Baal

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

Gods and Goddesses and Images of Gods, 97-108.

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)

Dick, M. in Walls, N. ed. *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East*, Boston 2005. p. 43- 67.

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

Black, J. and Green, A. 1992. *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*. London: British Museum Press. (Reference Room)

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

Dalley, S. 1989.. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McCall, H. 1990. *Mesopotamian Myths*. London: British Museum Publications.

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

in

Dalley, S. 1989. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McCall, H. 1990. *Mesopotamian Myths*. London: British Museum Publications.

Class Presentation:

The Epic of Gilgamesh (WARAKIAN-YAACOUB)

Reference

Dalley, S. 1989. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McCall, H. 1990. *Mesopotamian Myths*. London: British Museum Publications.

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.

