

Attention!

This is a representative syllabus.
The syllabus for the course you are
enrolled in will likely be different.

Please refer to your instructor's
syllabus for more information on
specific requirements for a given
semester.

CLASSICS 5401 AND NELC 5401: METHODOLOGIES FOR THE STUDY OF ANCIENT RELIGIONS

Office Hours:

Office:

The purpose of this course is to introduce some of the major methods for the study of religion that have emerged from the nineteenth century to the present, with emphasis on those most relevant for the study of religions in the ancient world. We will explore the origins of modern approaches to the study of religion; methods that developed out of sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies; and current critiques of those approaches. In the course of the semester you will produce a set of worksheets that will serve you as references for the future; present a summary of a particular thinker or approach to the class; and work on a “case study” in which you will gauge the relevance of one or more of these approaches to your main area of interest. At the end of the semester, you will have strengthened your skills in evaluating other scholars’ approaches critically and should be able to identify why a given approach will, or will not, help you in your own work. You will also develop skills in studying the ancient religions in which you are particularly interested within a comparative scope.

A HISTORY OF THIS COURSE

This course was created in 2011 by Professor Sarah Iles Johnston, who drew on two courses developed by Lindsay Jones for the undergraduate degree in religious studies from before OSU changed to a semester system. Professor Jones took two quarters (with two weekly meetings) to trace the history of our discipline; Professor Johnston transferred this into one quarter. In 2014 Professor Fritz Graf adapted the course for a semester, emphasizing both the major writers and their critics. I am indebted to Professors Jones, Johnston, and Graf for allowing me to borrow from their courses. For this course, we will emphasize two additional factors: The emergence of the study of religion as a modern discipline and its implications; and particular developments in religious studies most relevant to the study of antiquity and the middle ages. In this course there will also be a brief exercise in testing or applying theories of religion to your specific interests.

COURSE STRUCTURE:

This course is divided into four major sections. In the introductory section, we will survey the early history of modern concepts of religion. In the second section, we will study a few of the major figures in the study of religion from the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. For those, we will read:

- (1) a brief biographical review of his or her life and work;
- (2) a selected portion of his or her own writing on religion; and
- (3) a critical review of his or her continuing importance for contemporary religious studies or an example of a contrasting methodology in the same discipline.

We will then look at a few approaches to one phenomenon—sacrifice—that was a nearly ubiquitous feature of ancient religions.

In the third section, we will focus on modern methods for dealing with the variety of sources that we as historians of religion in antiquity handle, including texts and material culture. Near the

end of the semester you will present a “case study,” which will be a prospectus for the study of a subject in the field of your major or specialization, based on one or more of the methods we have studied. See below for details.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There will be no final research paper in this course. The main focus of the class will be on thoroughly learning the material as we study it, week-by-week during the semester itself. I will assess your success in doing so through the following criteria:

- (1) Class Participation:** This is a seminar. Attendance and participation are mandatory, and your success in the latter depends upon your completing the assigned reading prior to class. All students will be expected to participate actively in all sessions. The extent to which you take part in informed discussion will be a significant indicator of your success in this class.
- (2)** At least once during the course, each student will be responsible for **guiding the class discussion** on a particular scholar or topic. In the schedule below, I have indicated those sessions that a student can volunteer to lead by placing an asterisk in front of the day.
- (3) Worksheets:** Each student will complete a worksheet for selected scholars or approaches to be covered on a particular week. The scholars and topics for which worksheets are required are designated on the list of reading assignments below. These are intended to serve as life-long reference for you as well as to focus your concentration while you are initially learning the material. Worksheets must be turned in to me at the end of each class session.

On the day that you lead class discussion, you will make a particularly detailed worksheet, and make copies of it for the other students. (This way, each student will have two worksheets for each of the scholars and topics we study.) If you present a worksheet it may be worthwhile to read a whole book if we have read excerpts in class.
- (4) Prospectus:** Each student will give a brief presentation in which he or she will assess how one or more of the thinkers or approaches we have studied might be applied to a research project in that student’s specialty or major. This is not meant to be a full research paper, but rather a kind of “test case”: that is, a proposal for a future research project (real or hypothetical) in which you will select method or approach and gauge its relevance for a specific topic in your field. If you are working on a paper for another course and you are interested in presenting your prospectus in preparation for that paper, you may do so with the written approval of the instructor of that class. The presentation will be accompanied by a **3-5-page written summary** plus bibliography. **You must meet with me to discuss a topic and an approach at least two weeks before you present it.**
- (5)** During the course of the semester, you are encouraged to take advantage of at least one of the many lectures, colloquia, and organized discussions about religious studies and the ancient world that take place at OSU and nearby institutions, such as those sponsored

by the Classics, NELC, History, and History of Art departments, the Center for The Study of Religion, and the Melton Center for Jewish Studies, as well as the Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean (GISRAM). Events will be announced in the course of the semester and posted on the Carmen news site for the course.

The breakdown for grades will be as follows:

- Class Participation on a daily basis: 25%
- Leading discussion in class, including the accompanying worksheet: 15%
- Other worksheets: 40%
- Prospectus presentation: 20%

PLEASE NOTE:

- A. **University policy regarding academic misconduct such as cheating and plagiarism will be strictly enforced.** It is important that you understand what constitutes plagiarism and academic misconduct. Please review the University's rules and definitions at http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp
- B. Your OSU email account is the only one I will use to communicate with you. Please check your OSU account regularly or be sure that you have forwarded your OSU email to your personal account. You will receive important announcements about the course and the class schedule through that account.
- C. Any student who feels that he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss his or her specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at (614) 292-3307, or visit 150 Pomerene Hall, to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

TEXTS

Many of our readings are from the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed, edited by Lindsay Jones (designated as EoR in this syllabus): You can access it electronically through OSCAR.

The following books are important enough that you should buy them. If you do, you will have a useful library for the study of religion. They will be available at the Student Book Exchange (SBX) on High St. They will also be available on two-hour reserve at Thompson Library:

Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*
Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*
A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*
W.S.F. Pickering, ed. *Durkheim on Religion*
J.Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion*
J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*
Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*
Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*

All other readings will be posted on Carmen or will be available online in journals or e-books through OSCAR.

COURSE SCHEDULE

In this schedule, each number (1, 2, 3, etc.) represents a week of class. This schedule is subject to change. You will of course be notified in advance.

Part I: The History of the History of Religions

1. "Is There Life on Mars?"
 - Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, Introduction
 - Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Introduction
2. How Religion Became Religion
 - Wilfred Cantwell Smith: *The End and Meaning of Religion* ch. 2 (Carmen)
 - Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, ch. 9 (Carmen)
 - Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, excerpt (Carmen).

Part II: Methods in the Study of Religions

A. Sociological Approaches

3. The Sociology of Religion: Durkheim and Weber
 - Strenski, "Emile Durkheim" (EoR);
 - Introduction to *Durkheim on Religion*, ed. Pickering, pp. 1-10;
 - Excerpts from Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* in *Durkheim on Religion*, ed. Pickering, pp. 102-166.
 - Birnbaum, "Max Weber" (EoR);
 - Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, pp.1-31; 46-59; 151-206
- *Two Worksheets:** Max Weber and Emile Durkheim **Kayla Dang**

B. Religionswissenschaft

4. Myth and Ritual: Mircea Eliade
 - Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*
 - Kitagawa, "Mircea Eliade" (EoR);
 - Alles, "Wach, Eliade, and the Critique from Totality" (Carmen)
- *Worksheet:** Mircea Eliade **Kayla Dang**

C. Anthropology

5. Ritual and Myth: Rites of Passage
 - Myerhoff, Camino and Turner, "Rites of Passage: An Overview" (EoR)

- Stephenson, “Rites of Passage: An Overview (Further Considerations)” (EoR)
 - Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (read all of it **except** chapters 7 and 9)
 - Turner, *The Ritual Process*, pp. 1-43 & 94-203
- *Worksheet:** Victor Turner **or** Rites of Passage **Parker Selby**

6. Away from Ritual to Inner Experience? Mary Douglas

- Preston, “Purification: An Overview” (EoR)
- Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (read all of it **except** chapters 4, 5, 9,10)
- Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, chs. 1-2

***Worksheet:** Mary Douglas

Matthew Van Zile

7. Religion and Interpretation: Clifford Geertz

- Bohannan and Glazer, “Clifford Geertz” (Carmen)
- •Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” (Carmen)
- Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” (Carmen)
- Munson, “Geertz on Religion: The Theory and the Practice” (Carmen)

***Worksheet:** Clifford Geertz

Kati Fitzgerald

D. Gender and Women’s Studies

8. Women, Men, and Others

- Sian Hawthorne, “Feminism: Feminism and the Study of Religion” (EoR; this article is a subheading of “Feminism” in the EoR table of contents).
- June O'Connor, “The Epistemological Significance of Feminist Research in Religion” (Carmen)
- Caroline Walker Bynum, “Women’s Stories, Women’s Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality” (Carmen)

***Worksheet:** Feminist approaches to Religious Studies

Kati Fitzgerald

E. A Case study

9. The Case of Sacrifice: Anthropological approaches

- John Middleton, “Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (EoR)’
- Marcel Fournier, “Marcel Mauss” (EoR)
- Huber and Mauss, “The Scheme of Sacrifice” (Carmen)
- Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, excerpts (Carmen)

***Worksheet:** Evans-Pritchard and Huber and Mauss

Parker Selby

10. The Case of Sacrifice: Walter Burkert and Sociobiology

- Burkert, *Homo Necans*, Part I (pp. 1-82) (Carmen)
- Walter Burkert, *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions*, Preface, Chapter One and Conclusion (Carmen)
- Masuzawa on Walter Burkert’s *The Creation of the Sacred*, in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 10 (1998):106-114 (Carmen).

***Worksheet:** Walter Burkert

Matthew Van Zile

Part III: Data for the Study of Religions

11. Dealing with People: The search for the historical “holy man”

- Peter Brown, “The Holy Man in Late Antiquity” (Carmen)
- Helen K. Bond, “The Quest for the Historical Jesus: An Appraisal”
- Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, ch. 1

***Worksheet:** The Quest for the Historical Jesus

Johnny Abi-Rached

Sessions 12 and 13 will be held together:

12. Dealing with Words: Orality and Textuality

- W. Graham, “Scripture” (EoR)
- Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, chs. 2 and 6 (Carmen)
- Martin Jaffee, “How Much Orality in Rabbinic Judaism?”
- Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant*, excerpts (Carmen)

13. Dealing with Things: Materialism and materiality

- Jas Elsner, *Roman Eyes*, ch. 1 (Carmen)
- Patricia Cox Miller, “Differential Networks” (Carmen)

Part IV: The Future of the History of the History of Religions?

14. What Do We Study When We Study Religion?: Jonathan Z. Smith

- Smith, *Imagining Religion*, Introduction and chs. 2 and 4
- Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, chs. 2-5
- Sam Gill, “No Place To Stand: Jonathan Z. Smith as *Homo Ludens*, The Academic Study of Religion *Sub Specie Ludi*,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol.66, no. 2 (1998): pp. 283-312 (available on OSCAR)

***Worksheet:** Jonathan Z. Smith

David Everett

15. “Religion” and Its Discontents:

- Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* chs. 1-2 (Carmen)
- **Get the following three articles from *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* online through OSCAR)**
- Bruce Lincoln, “Theses on Method,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*; vol. 8 (1996) pp. 225-227, republished in vol. 17 (2005): 8-10.
- Tim Fitzgerald, “Bruce Lincoln’s ‘Theses on Method’: Antitheses” in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 18 (2006): pp. 392-423
- Bruce Lincoln, “Concessions, Confessions, Clarifications, Ripostes: By Way of Response to Tim Fitzgerald”; *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 19, nos. 1-2 (January 1, 2007): pp. 163-168.

***Worksheet:** Bruce Lincoln

Dillon Sampson