

# 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.

# Religions of Ancient Iran

NELC 7503

Instructor:

Contact:

Office Hours:

## Course Description and Goals:

This **graduate seminar** introduces participants to the advanced study of the religions of ancient Iran. These include not only the beliefs, rituals, texts, and ideas of ancient Iranians which came to be systematized selectively as **Zoroastrianism**, but also the religions of the Mesopotamian Aramaeans ruled by the ancient Persian Sasanid dynasty, such as early **rabbinic Judaism, East-Syrian Christianity, Mandaicism, and Manichaeism**, all products of the period of Persian rule from 224 to 651, and all of which had to deal with Zoroastrian authority. It also discusses the conversion of Iranians to Islam in the wake of the Arab conquest and the phenomena of **Islam in Iran** and Iranian counter-movements drawing from older Iranian traditions.

The seminar pays special attention to the problematic category of *religion* itself, which some scholars claim to have come into being under Sasanian Persian rule or at least during that period. Of course, religion is a category with far-reaching ramifications for us today, giving ancient Iranian religions great relevance beyond their historical and geographic scope. To make sense of these arguments, much of the course will deal with the constitution of ancient Iranian religions as social organizations, requiring in turn an introduction to selected methods of historical sociology.

The outlook of the course is retrospective, paying close attention to the survival of ancient practices and texts through endangering circumstances and processes of selection for survival and attrition. Therefore we begin at the chronological end, with the conversion of the majority of the Iranian population to Islam, a process through which all ancient Iranian religions had to adapt or disappear. From there we work back to the instantiation of religion as a category under Sasanid rule and the confrontation of the mythology of the prehistoric Iranians with that of Jerusalem. Then we trace certain traditions, particularly Zoroastrian ones, back to early ancient history and pre-history.

The seminar requires students to grapple with these subjects through the issues most critical in current scholarship and by way of both theoretical approaches and the study of primary sources.

In addition to substantial reading and oral reports, each student will produce a 15- to-18- page research paper on a topic of substance pertinent to ancient Iranian religions chosen in consultation with the instructor. Students are encouraged to use these papers to test components of a larger future project, such as a doctoral dissertation.

### **Learning Objectives**

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to discuss and conduct research on the religions of ancient Iran, including the history and early development of Zoroastrianism, Rabbinic Judaism, Mandaeism, East-Syrian Christianity, early Islam, and other religions, as well as the category of religion itself.

### **Required Texts and Course Materials**

Required readings are listed in the schedule below. Most of the readings may be found on the *Carmen* site of this course. Some of the readings are freely available on the internet; direct links are found below. A complete bibliographical list will be made available for students who wish to purchase the books from which the reading list has been compiled.

The following readings are not provided. Students can find them via online bookstores. Bookfinder.com will provide links to different vendors after displaying a comparative price list.

- Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007 (recommended not required).
- Richard Bulliet, *Islam: A View from the Edge*, New York City: Columbia University Press 1994.
- Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu, *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004.
- Kyle Smith (trans.), *The Martyrdom and the History of the Blessed Simeon Bar Šabba'e*, Piscataway: Gorgias Press 2014.

### **Academic Misconduct**

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (<http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>).”

### **Disability policy**

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should

inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

FOR YOUR SAFETY, the OSU Student Safety/Escort Service is available after 7 p.m. by dialing 292-3322.

### **Attendance Policy**

Each meeting will cover a substantial quantity of material. Plan to show up to every meeting. If you know in advance you will miss a meeting, let me know immediately. More than two unexcused absences will result in a grade of "EN" for the course.

### **Grading Scale and Assignments**

A = 93-100, A- = 90-92, B+ = 87-89, B = 83-86, B- = 80-82, C+ = 77-79, C = 73-76, C- = 70-72, D+ = 67-69, D = 60-66, E = 0-59

- Active participation in the discussion of course materials is a basic requirement and is assumed. Non-participation will be treated as an absence (see above).
- Write ten responses to the readings, each of 300-600 words (25% = 2.5 points each).

*Due weekly (choose ten different weeks)*

The purpose of these written responses is to demonstrate your analysis and critical thinking about the readings and to prepare you to participate fruitfully in discussion during the class sessions.

- Write a 600-900 word proposal for your final paper (5% = 5 points).  
*Due during Week 9.*
- Write a detailed outline of the final paper (15% = 15 points).  
*Due during week 12.*
- 15-minute presentation on your final paper topic and hypotheses or tentative findings (15% = 15 points).  
*Presented at final meeting in week 15*
- Write a final paper 15-20 pages long (not counting bibliography) (40% = 40 points).  
*Due Wednesday, December 16 by 2 pm in hard copy submitted to instructor.*

Final papers should address one of three topics, relative to religions of ancient Iran, addressed throughout the seminar:

- 1.** The social organization of religious groups (such as economic basis of organization, services provided, monopoly by experts, generation of authority, conversion, demography, etc.) (See especially readings for weeks 2 and 3.)
- 2.** The processes of survival and selection of religious texts, practices, and institutions. (Under discussion nearly every week.)

### 3. Religion as a category. (See especially weeks 3 and 7.)

*Readings listed below are to be read in preparation for the session in which they are listed.*

*Schedule subject to changes upon announcement.*

#### **Week 1. Aug 31. Ancient Iranian Religions: Definitions. Historical Framework. The Big Issues. Expectations. Plans for study.**

- Recommended preparation: Read Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity*, pp. 9-49 and 210-231 (optionally: entire book).

#### **Week 2. Sept 7. Labor Day: No meeting. Read ahead for the next session!**

- Rodney Stark, *Sociology*, chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 1-64), chapters 3 & 4 (67-121), chapter 14 (pp. 393-416)
- Rodney Stark, "Conversion and Christian Growth," in *The Rise of Christianity*, pp. 3-27.
- Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period*, pp. 1-63.

#### **Week 3. Sept 14. Religious groups as social groups. Growth, attrition, conversion. Economy of religion. Religion as a category.**

- Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Volume 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760*, chapter 1, "Societies as organized power networks" (pp. 1-33), and chapter 10, "Ideology transcendent: the Christian *ecumene*" (pp. 301-340).
- Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion* (pp. 15-159).

#### **Week 4. Sept 21. Zoroastrian Ritual and Avestan Recitation.**

- Zoroastrian Ritual: The Yasna today  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHXKITid2jk>
- Michael Stausberg and Ramiyar P. Karanjia, "Ritual," in Michael Stausberg, Yuhan Vevaina, and Anna Tessmann, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, Wiley Blackwell 2015, pp. 363-377.
- Listen to a sample of Avestan recitations: [http://www.avesta.org/ka/ka\\_tc.htm](http://www.avesta.org/ka/ka_tc.htm)
- Almut Hintze, "Avestan Literature," pp. 1-71.
- The Gathas (in the Avesta), Helmut Humbach and Klaus Faiss, *Zarathushtra and His Antagonists: A Sociolinguistic Study with English and German Translations of His Gathas*, Reichert 2010, pp. 72-163 (~30 pages of English).
- Skim the Avesta, in Bleek's translation of Spiegel's German translation, three volumes in one:  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=8b00AAAAQAAJ&dq=bleeck%20avesta&pg=PR3#v=onepage&q&f=false>. Read the Videvdad more closely.

- Read the *Videvdad* (a.k.a. “*Vendidad*”), English, all sections.  
<http://www.avesta.org/vendidad/index.html>

<p><b>Week 5. Sept 28. Ancient Royal Zoroastrianism.</b></p>
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- Pierre Briant, “History of the Persian Empire (550-330 BC),” and Matthew Stolper, “Achaemenid Languages and Inscriptions,” in *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia*, ed. John Curtis and Nigel Tallis, University of California 2005, pp. 12-24.
- Pierre Briant, “Chapter 6. Representations of Royalty and Monarchic Ideology. 6. Between Men and Gods,” in *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, pp. 240-254.
- Herodotus, *Histories* 1.131-140. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hh/index.htm>
- Royal Inscriptions of the Achaemenids  
[www.livius.org/persia.html](http://www.livius.org/persia.html). Scroll to the bottom of the page to find the link “Royal inscriptions” (under the heading “Other”). Click the link to find a catalogue of the Achaemenid inscriptions.
  1. Study DB (columns #1-#5) and DBa-k. Take a good look at the accompanying photographs of the reliefs.
  2. Study DSf at the palace of Susa.
  3. Study DNa and DNb on Darius’ tomb at Naqš-i Rostam.
  4. Also explore the links to the sites of Persepolis, Susa, and Naqš-i Rostam. Pay attention to the photos of the inscriptions.
  5. Now move on to the inscriptions of Xerxes I at Persepolis. Study XPa and XPh.
  6. Finally, study some of the inscriptions of later Achaemenids. Make sure to look at A2Sa and A3Pa.
- Oktor Skjærvø, “Avestan Quotations in Old Persian? Literary Sources of the Old Persian Inscriptions,” *Irano-Judaica* 4 (1999): 1-64.
- Albert de Jong, “Religion and Politics in Pre-Islamic Iran,” in Michael Stausberg, Yuhán Vevaina, and Anna Tessmann, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, Wiley Blackwell 2015, pp. 85-101.
- Albert de Jong, “One Nation under God? The Early Sasanians as Guardians and Destroyers of Holy Sites,” in Reinhard Gregor Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann (eds.), *Götterbilder – Gottesbilder – Weltbilder: Polytheismus und Monotheismus in der Welt der Antike, Band I: Ägypten, Mesopotamien, Persien, Kleinasien, Syrien, Palästina*, Mohr Siebeck 2009, pp. 223-238.
- Strabo XV.3.13-16:  
<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/home.html>
- Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 46-47:  
[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis and Osiris\\*/home.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis and Osiris*/home.html)
- Diogenes Laertius 1.6-9.

- Sasanian Rock Reliefs and Inscriptions <http://www.livius.org/sao-sd/sassanids/sassanid-reliefs.html>
  - ŠKZ (inscription: Šapur: Ka‘ba-yi Zardušt): <http://parthiansources.com/texts/skz/>
  - Paikuli Inscription of Narseh [www.kurdistanica.com/sites/default/files/The%20Sassanian%20Inscription%20of%20Paikuli.pdf](http://www.kurdistanica.com/sites/default/files/The%20Sassanian%20Inscription%20of%20Paikuli.pdf)  
Wikipedia article on Paikuli inscription: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paikuli\\_inscription](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paikuli_inscription)
  - KNRm (inscription Kartīr: Naqš-i Rostam), circa 276-293 CE, ed. and trans. D. MacKenzie, and trans. and analysis by P.O. Skjærvø (READ BOTH)
- On the site of the inscriptions of Naqš-i Rostam and Ka‘ba-yi Zardušt: <http://www.livius.org/na-nd/naqsh-i-rustam/naqsh-i-rustam.html>

#### **Week 6. Oct 5. Sasanian Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism**

- Gardner and Lieu, *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire*, Cambridge 2004 pp. 3-89, 109-191, 231-280.
- Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, HarperCollins 1993, pp. 29-88.

#### **Week 7. Oct 12. The Category of Religion in Ancient Iran.**

- Jason BeDuhn, “Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of Religion,” in Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley, *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, Brill 2015, pp. 247-275
- Paul Dilley, “‘Hell Exists, and We Have Seen the Place Where It Is’: Rapture and Religious Competition in Sasanian Iran,” in Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley, *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, Brill 2015, pp. 211-246.
- Adam Becker, “Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and ‘Fear’ as a Category of Piety in the Sasanian Empire: The Case of the Martyrdom of Gregory and the Martyrdom of Yazdpaneh,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2.2 (2009): 300-336.

#### **Week 8. Oct 19. Martyrs before the Magi: the East-Syrian and Armenian churches.**

- Scott McDonough, “A Question of Faith? Persecution and Political Centralization in the Sasanian Empire of Yazdgerd II (438-457 CE),” in Hal Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, pp. 69-81.
- Philip Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert: Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq*, Oxford University Press 2013, pp. 1-2, 31-65.
- The Revolt of Vardan: Book 1 of *The History of Łazar P‘arpec‘i*, trans. from Armenian by Robert W. Thomson, pp. 33-157.
- *The Martyrdom and the History of the Blessed Simeon Bar Šabba‘e*, trans. Kyle Smith, Gorgias Press, pp. 61-211 (English text occurs mostly on even pages only).

- Adam Becker, "Political Theology and Religious Diversity in the Sasanian Empire," in *Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians: Religious Dynamics in a Sasanian Context*, ed. Geoffrey Herman, Gorgias, 2014, pp. 7-25.

### **Week 9. Oct 26. Islam Comes to Iran.**

- Robert Hoyland, "Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion," in S.F. Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Oxford 2012, pp. 1053-1077.
- Elton Daniel, "The Islamic East," in Chase Robinson (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 448-505.
- Richard Bulliet, *Islam: A View from the Edge*, pp. 13-168.

### **Week 10. Nov 2. The Ninth-Century Zoroastrian Books.**

- Read Mansour Shaki, "Dādestān ī Dēnīg," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*  
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dadestan-i-denig-religious>
- Skim the *Dādistān ī Dēnīg*: <http://www.avesta.org/mp/dd.htm#chapter1>
- Philippe Gignoux, "Dēnkard," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*  
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/denkard>
- Mansour Shaki, "The Dēnkard Account of the History of Zoroastrian Scriptures," *Archív Orientální* 49 (1981): 114-125.
- Read *Dēnkard*  
<http://www.avesta.org/denkard/denkard.htm>
- D. MacKenzie, "Bundahišn," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*:  
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bundahisn-primal-creation>
- Bundahišn translated by E.W. West: <http://www.avesta.org/mp/bundahis.html>

### **Week 11. Nov 9. Zoroastrian Sects?**

- Robert Zaehner, *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, 1955, pp. 225-450.
- Shaul Shaked, "The Myth of Zurvan: Cosmology and Eschatology," in Ithamar Gruenwald, Shaul Shaked, and Gadaliahu G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Messiah and Christos: Studies in the Jewish Origins of Christianity Presented to David Flusser*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992, pp. 219-240.
- François de Blois, "Dualism in Iranian and Christian Traditions," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 10.1 (April 2000): 1-19.  
<http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/stable/25187928>
- Albert de Jong, "Zurvanism," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*:  
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zurvanism>
- Patricia Crone, "Introduction" to her book *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 1-27.
- Patricia Crone's lecture online, "The Acculturated Native Who Rebels,"  
<https://video.ias.edu/the-acculturated-native> (approximately one hour long). This lecture was delivered on December 1, 2009, to and was intended for an educated general audience (not advanced specialists).



- Patricia Crone, “Korramis” (i.e. Khurramīs), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/korramis>
- François de Blois, “A New Look at Mazdak,” in Teresa Bernheimer and Adam Silverstein (eds), *Late Antiquity: Eastern Perspectives*, 2012, pp. 13-24.

### **Week 12. Nov 16. Jews of Sasanian and Post-Sasanian Babylonia**

- Marina Rustow, “The Tripartite Community,” in *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate*, Cornell University Press 2008, pp. 3-35.
- Isaiah Gafni, “The Political, Social, and Economic History of Babylonian Jewry,” *Cambridge History of Judaism, vol. 4: The Late-Roman Rabbinic Period*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 792-820. Available as a pdf through OSU Library.
- Phillip Ackerman-Lieberman, “Sherira Gaon,” *Encyclopaedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/sherira-gaon-SIM\\_0020120](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/sherira-gaon-SIM_0020120)
- David Goodblatt, “The History of the Babylonian Academies,” *Cambridge History of Judaism, vol. 4: The Late-Roman Rabbinic Period*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 821-839. Available as a pdf through OSU Library.
- Marina Rustow, “Yeshivot in Babylonia/Iraq,” *Encyclopaedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/yeshivot-in-babylonia-iraq-COM\\_0022360](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/yeshivot-in-babylonia-iraq-COM_0022360)
- Richard Kalmin, “The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud,” *Cambridge History of Judaism, vol. 4: The Late-Roman Rabbinic Period*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 840-876. Available as a pdf through OSU Library.
- Yakov Elman and Shai Secunda, “Judaism,” in Michael Stausberg, Yuhan Vevaina, and Anna Tessmann, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, Wiley Blackwell 2015, pp. 423-435.

### **Week 13. Nov 23. Mandaean of Sasanian and Post-Sasanian Mesene**

- Mandaean Baptism (video, with mostly Arabic speech, liturgy heard in background in classical Mandaic): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kv-5ynXS3UI>
- Iraqi Madaeans Celebrate (full of popular conceptions): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSp7j8F\\_cMU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSp7j8F_cMU)
- Jorunn Buckley, *The Madaeans: Ancient Texts and Modern People*, Oxford 2002, pp. 1-107.
- Kurt Rudolph, “Part 2. Mandaean Sources,” in Werner Foerster (ed.), *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts* (English trans. by R. McL. Wilson), volume II: Coptic and Mandaean Sources, Oxford (1974), pp. 121-319, 344-349.

- “*The Haran Gawaita*,” ed. E.S. Drower, Vatican 1953, pp. 3-23.
- Kevin van Bladel, *From Sasanian Mandeans to Šābians of the Marshes*, under review with Brill, pp. 1-97.

○ <b>Week 14. Nov 30. Various Zoroastrianisms: the Roman Empire, Armenia, Georgia, Central Asia, and China.</b> (249 pages)
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Roger Beck, “<a href="#">Mithraism</a>,” <i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>.</li> <li>○ Roger Beck, “Zoroaster iv. as perceived by the Greeks,” <i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>, <a href="http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zoroaster-iv-as-perceived-by-the-greeks">http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zoroaster-iv-as-perceived-by-the-greeks</a></li> <li>○ Albert de Jong, “Amernian and Georgian Zoroastrianism,” in Michael Stausberg, Yuhan Vevaina, and Anna Tessmann, <i>The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism</i>, Wiley Blackwell 2015, pp. 119-128.</li> <li>○ Frantz Grenet, “Zoroastrianism in Central Asia,” in Michael Stausberg, Yuhan Vevaina, and Anna Tessmann, <i>The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism</i>, Wiley Blackwell 2015, pp. 129-146.</li> <li>○ Takeshi Aoki, “Zoroastrianism in the Far East,” in Michael Stausberg, Yuhan Vevaina, and Anna Tessmann, <i>The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism</i>, Wiley Blackwell 2015, pp. 147-156.</li> <li>○ John R. Hinnells, “The Parsis,” in Michael Stausberg, Yuhan Vevaina, and Anna Tessmann, <i>The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism</i>, Wiley Blackwell 2015, pp. 157-172.</li> <li>○ Michael Stausberg, “Zoroastrians in Modern Iran,” in Michael Stausberg, Yuhan Vevaina, and Anna Tessmann, <i>The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism</i>, Wiley Blackwell 2015, pp. 173-190.</li> </ul> |
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<b>Week 15. Dec 7. Student Presentations.</b>
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**Final Paper Due by Wednesday, December 16 by 2 pm in hard copy in instructor’s office mailbox.**