Ancient Near Eastern Religion and Mythology
NEJS 116a - Fall 2016 – Tuesday and Thursday, 2:00 - 3:20
Lown 201

Instructor: Tzvi Abusch
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Course Requirements:

- Attendance at all lectures and class participation.
- Reading all primary texts and modern treatments as outlined below.
- Article summaries. All students will complete short (one page, double-spaced) summaries of a select number of articles to be chosen by Professor Abusch.
- Each graduate student will present a 15-minute oral summary/review of an article to be chosen by Professor Abusch; upon Professor Abusch’s approval, undergraduates will be permitted to make presentations for extra credit.
- Midterm Exam on October 20th (Thurs.) – covering readings from A. Cotterell (The Encyclopedia of Ancient Civilizations) and T. Jacobsen (Treasures of Darkness, pp. 1-164 and 195-219 [this text forms the intellectual framework of the course]), as well as lectures and readings from Sections I-II.
- 3-5 page treatment of a myth due November 10th (Thurs.) (details to follow in class).
- A term paper (15-20 pages) due December 6th (Tues.).

Books to Acquire (available at the University Bookstore):


Course Description:
This course is an introduction to the religion, mythology, and thought of the ancient Near East. In outline form, the topics to be covered in this course include the following:

I. Introduction

**Available on LATTE
A. Ancient Near Eastern History and Literature
B. Mesopotamian Religion (Pantheon, Cult and Prayer)
C. The Nature of Myth

II. Epic of Gilgamesh

III. Mesopotamian Myths of Creation
A. Creation of Humanity
B. Creation of Civilization and the Flood
C. Creation of Cosmos

IV. Myths of Combat in the Ancient Near East

V. Biblical Mythology and Religion

VI. Mesopotamian and Canaanite Myths of Life and Death

General Comments:

1. Professor Abusch is available to discuss any aspect of the course or your work with you. Please make an appointment or come by during regular office hours. Office: Lown 313; Ext. 62969. Jared Pfost, the course TF, is also available for assistance by appointment and will hold regular office hours. Email: jpfost@brandeis.edu.

2. If you are a student with documented disabilities on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see Professor Abusch immediately.

3. Academic Integrity: According to the student handbook, every member of the community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty. A student will not receive credit for work that is not the product of the student’s own effort. Any words or ideas that are not the student’s own must be explicitly attributed to their source. Violations of University policies on academic integrity, described in Section 3 of Rights and Responsibilities, may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. If you are in doubt about the instruction for any assignment in this course, you must ask for clarification.

4. Computer use in class is limited to note-taking only. Use for other purposes will result in suspension of the right to use a computer in class for the remainder of the semester.

5. Success in this 4 credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Course Schedule

I. Introduction

A. Ancient Near Eastern History and Literature

1. History


2. Literature

   Abusch, “Cuneiform Writing.” **
   Leick, *Dictionary*, ix-xiii.
The syllabus is tentative and subject to change.

Foster, *From Distant Days*, 1-8.

**Mesopotamian Religion (Pantheon, Cult and Prayer)**

1. **Nature and Pantheon**

   Foster, *From Distant Days*, Ishtar Prayers (238-246), Marduk Prayer (247-248), Shamash Prayer (262-266).


   Wiggermann, “Theologies, Priests.”


2. **Cult**


   Abusch, “Sacrifice in Mesopotamia.”


3. **Prayer**


   Abusch, “Form and Meaning.”

C. **The Nature of Myth**


   Burkert, *Structure and History*, chapter 1 (“The Organization of Myth” [1-34]).

   Batto, *Slaying the Dragon*, chapter 1 (“Mythopoeic Speculation in Babylon” [15-40]).

**Bibliography for Section I:**

**Primary Texts**


**Modern Treatments**

II. Epic of Gilgamesh

A. Introduction

George, Epic of Gilgamesh, Introduction.
Abusch, “Gilgamesh: Hero, King.”
Abusch, Male and Female in the Epic of Gilgamesh, Introduction.

B. Standard Babylonian (SB) Version (Tablets I-XI)

1. Overview

George, Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablets I-XI.

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Jacobsen, Treasures of Darkness, chapter 7.
Kirk, Myth: Its Meaning and Function, 132-152.

Tablets I-II

** chapter 11 (“The Early Life of Enkidu”), 198-213.
Abusch, “Courtesan.”**
Moran, “Ovid's Blanda Voluptas.”** (Recommended)
Fleming & Milstein, *Buried Foundation of the Gilgamesh Epic*, chapter 1
(“Introduction”), 1-17.**
Fleming & Milstein, *Buried Foundation of the Gilgamesh Epic*, chapter 2 (“Enkidu’s
First Steppe: Competing Portraits...”), 19-42.**

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### Tablets III-V

Sumerian Forerunners: Gilgamesh and Huwawa, George, *Epic of Gilgamesh*,
149-166.

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Abusch, “Hunting in the Epic of Gilgamesh.”**
Fleming & Milstein, *Buried Foundation of the Gilgamesh Epic*, chapter 3 (“Defining the
Bounds of the Akkadian Huwawa Narrative”), 43-67.**

### Tablet VI

Sumerian Forerunner: Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven, George, *Epic of
Gilgamesh*, 166-175.

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Abusch, “Ishtar's Proposal.”**

### Tablets VII-XI

#### C. Old Babylonian Version

Greek: Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book V (Calypso).**

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Abusch, “Gilgamesh's Request, Part I.”**
Abusch, “Mourning the Death of a Friend.”**
Abusch, “Gilgamesh's Request, Part II.”** (Recommended)
Fleming & Milstein, *Buried Foundation of the Gilgamesh Epic*, chapter 4 (“From
Sumerian to Akkadian”), 69-90.**
Jacobsen, “Gilgamesh Epic: Tragic.”** (Recommended)

#### D. Twelve Tablet Version

Greek: Homer, *The Odyssey*, Books X-XI (Circe and Trip to Netherworld).**

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Reread: Abusch, “Ishtar’s Proposal,” 179-187.**

#### E. Synthesis and Literary History

Abusch, “Development and Meaning.”**
Fleming & Milstein, *Buried Foundation of the Gilgamesh Epic*, chapter 5 (“Behind

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Penn”), 91-110.**
Tigay, “Evolution of the Pentateuchal Narratives.”**
Reread: Abusch, “Gilgamesh's Request, Part I,” 9-14.**
Reread: Abusch, “Courtesan,” 428-433.**
Abusch, “Epic of Gilgamesh and the Homeric Epics.”**

Bibliography for Section II:

**Primary Texts**

- Greek: Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book V (Calypso).

**Modern Treatments**

* The syllabus is tentative and subject to change.


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### III. Mesopotamian Myths of Creation

#### A. Creation of Humanity

1. **The Myth of Atrahasis: The Creation of Humanity**

   Foster, *From Distant Days*, Atrahasis, 52-77.

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   Abusch, “Ghost and God.”**
   Moran, “Some Considerations,” 245-255.**

2. **The Atrahasis Tradition: Antecedents and Developments**

   Foster, *From Distant Days*, Enuma Elish, Tablet VI, 38-42.
   Foster, *Before the Muses*, Creation of Humankind, 491-493.**

**Bibliography for Section III A:**

**Primary Texts**


**Modern Treatments**

B. Creation of Civilization and the Flood

1. The Flood: Its Literary Contexts and Significance
   Foster, *From Distant Days*, Atrahasis, 52-77.
   Genesis 6:5-9:17
       Moran, “Atrahasis.”**
       Kilmer, “Mesopotamian Concept.”**

2. From Nature to Culture: The Creation of Civilization
   Pritchard, *ANET*, Sumerian King List, 265-266.**
   Jacobsen, “Eridu Genesis.”**

Bibliography for Section III B:

Primary Texts

Modern Treatments

C. Creation of Cosmos

   Foster, *From Distant Days*, Enuma Elish, 9-51.

2. The Centrality of the Capital Babylon: The God Marduk

**Available on LATTE
Abusch, “Marduk.”**

Bibliography for Section III C:

**Primary Texts**


**Modern Treatments**


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**IV. Myths of Combat in the Ancient Near East**

**A. Ninurta and his Enemies**


**B. Other Conflicts**

Hesiod, *The Theogony*.
Coogan and Smith, *Stories from Ancient Canaan*, Baal and Yamm, 110-115.
YHWH and his Enemies: Isa. 27:1; Isa. 51:9-10; Hab. 3:8-9; Ps. 74:12-17; Ps. 89:9-12; Job 9:13-14; Job 26:12-13, etc.
Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, Hurrian Myths, 38-61.**
Foster, *Before the Muses*, 489-491 (“Myth of the Plow”).**

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Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, chapter 2 (“Creation Myths in the Ancient Near East [21–32]).**

Bibliography for Section IV:

**Primary Texts**


**Available on LATTE**
* The syllabus is tentative and subject to change.

- Hebrew Bible.

**Modern Treatments**

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**V. Biblical Myths and Religion**

**Literary Structure, Psychology, and Rhetoric**

Jonah 1-4

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Abusch, “Jonah and God”**

**The Primeval History**

Genesis 1-11.

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Speiser, *Genesis*, xvii-liii.**
Kaufmann, *Religion of Israel*, 60-121.**
Abusch, “Biblical Accounts of Pre-History, 1-17.”**

**Bibliography for Section V:**

**Primary Texts**
- Hebrew Bible: Jonah; Genesis 1-11.

**Modern Treatments**

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**VI. Mesopotamian and Canaanite Myths of Life and Death**

**A. The Netherworld**


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**Available on LATTE**
Abusch, “Etemmu.”**
Abusch, “Ascent to the Stars.”**

B. The Descent of Inanna/Ishtar

Foster, *From Distant Days*, Descent of Ishtar, 78-84.

Abusch, “Ishtar.”**
Katz, *The Image of the Netherworld*, 265-280.**

C. Other Journeys of Ascent and Descent

Foster, *From Distant Days*,
Nergal and Ereshkigal, 85-96.
Adapa, 97-101.
Etana, 102-114.

Ponchia and Luukko, *Nergal and Ereškigal*, ix-xix.**

D. West Semitic Mythology

Coogan and Smith, *Stories from Ancient Canaan*, Baal versus Mot, 139-153.
Hebrew Bible.

Geller, *Sacred Enigmas*, 168-194.**
Miller, “Aspects of the Religion of Ugarit,” 53-66.**
del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion*, 43-57.**

Bibliography for Section VI:

Primary Texts


Modern Treatments


**Available on LATTE
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