

Magic and Witchcraft in the Ancient Near East

NEJS 122A - Fall 2018

Prof. Tzvi Abusch

Course Description:

Magical literature, rituals, and beliefs in the ancient Near East, especially Mesopotamia. Topics include demonology, illness, prayer, exorcism, and theodicy, with special attention to witchcraft.

Course Requirements:

Undergraduates:

1. Attendance at all lectures is expected. Students are allowed two unexcused absences. More absences may endanger your grade and can lead to failure.
2. All assigned general and specific secondary readings as well as primary sources are to be read.
3. Abstracts of a select number of assigned readings are to be submitted on Latte at Friday by 5:00 p.m. These same readings will usually have been discussed sometime during the preceding Monday or Wednesday in a graduate student presentation.
4. Students will submit two text analyses. These analyses will examine elements or aspects of a magical ceremony: 1) A god or demon figure addressed in an incantation or prayer and/or otherwise involved in the ceremony (3 pages, double spaced, due on Friday, Oct. 12); 2) An oral rite, i.e. a prayer or an incantation (5 pages, double spaced, due on Friday, Nov. 16).
5. Final Exam.

Graduates:

1. Attendance at all lectures is expected. Students are allowed two unexcused absences. More absences may endanger your grade and can lead to failure.
2. All assigned general and specific secondary readings as well as primary sources are to be read.
3. Each graduate student will present oral summaries and critiques of two readings. These readings will be selected from the readings assigned for the undergraduate abstracts. After the presentation, please submit the lecture you have given (notes, powerpoint, etc.). A sign-up sheet will be passed around.
4. Graduate students will submit a 10-12 page paper. This paper is not primarily a research paper, but explores some issue touched upon in the course.

5. Final Exam.

Grading:

Undergraduate:

Prepared Attendance and Participation	25%
Abstracts and Analyses	50%
Final	25%

Graduate:

Prepared Attendance and Participation	25%
Presentations (two)	25%
Paper (10-12 pages)	25%
Final	25%

General Comments:

1. I will be happy to discuss any aspect of the course or your work with you. Please make an appointment or come by during my regular office hours. Justin Huguenin will serve as a TF for this course. He is available to answer your question and to provide help with the assignments and will conduct a review session for the exam. He will also manage the on-line course materials. You may contact him at jmmhug@brandeis.edu for help or to make an appointment.

Important Notices:

If you are a student with a documented disability at Brandeis University and if you wish to request a reasonable accommodation for this class, please see me immediately. Please keep in mind that reasonable accommodations are not provided retroactively.

Plagiarism of any kind is not tolerated at Brandeis. Educate yourself on the definition of academic plagiarism so that you can avoid it.

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.

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.

Success in this 4 credit-hour 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.).

Books to be Acquired

Abusch, T. *The Witchcraft Series* Maqlû (Writings From the Ancient World, vol. 37). Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2015.

Black, J. and A. Green, A. *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992

Cryer, F. H. and M.-L. Thomsen. *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Biblical and Pagan Societies*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

Foster, B. *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*. Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005.

Jacobsen, Th. *The Treasures of Darkness: a History of Mesopotamian Religion*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976.

Tentative Schedule:

Week 1

First day: Wed., Aug. 29

Week 2

No class on Monday, Sept. 3.

Wed., Sept 5

Brandeis Monday on Thursday, Sept. 6

Week 3

No class on Monday, Sept. 10

Wed, Sept 12. (1st graduate presentation)

Due on Friday: undergraduate abstracts

Week 4

Mon., Sept. 17 (2nd graduate presentation)

No class on Wednesday, Sept. 19

Due on Friday: undergraduate abstracts

Week 5

No class on Monday, Sept. 24

Brandeis Monday on Tuesday, Sept. 25

Wednesday, Sept. 26 (3rd graduate presentation)

Due on Friday: undergraduate abstracts

Week 6

No class on Monday, Oct. 1

Wednesday, Oct. 3 (4th graduate presentation)

Due on Friday: undergraduate abstracts

Week 7

Monday, Oct. 8

Wednesday, Oct 10

Due on Friday: first undergrad text analysis on a god or demon figure (3 pages).

Week 8

Monday Oct. 15 (5th graduate presentation)

Wednesday, Oct. 17

Due on Friday: undergraduate abstracts

Week 9

Monday, Oct. 22 (6th graduate presentation)

Wednesday, Oct. 24

Due on Friday: undergraduate abstracts

Week 10

Monday, Oct. 29 (7th graduate presentation)

Wednesday Oct. 31

Due on Friday: undergraduate abstracts

Week 11

Monday, Nov. 5 (8th graduate presentation)

Wednesday, Nov. 7

Due on Friday: undergraduate abstracts

Week 12

Monday, Nov. 12 (9th graduate presentation)

Wednesday, Nov. 14 (10th graduate presentation)

Due on Friday: second undergraduate text analysis on an oral rite (5 pages).

Week 13

Monday, Nov. 19

No class on Wednesday Nov. 21 for Thanksgiving break

Week 14

Monday, Nov. 26

Wednesday, Nov. 28

Due on Wednesday: graduate student paper (10-12 pages).

Week 15

Monday, Dec. 3 (11th graduate presentation)

Wednesday, Dec. 5 (12th graduate presentation)

Week 16

Monday, Dec. 10

Course Outline:

Introduction: Reading from selection of magical texts

1. Magic: General
 - A. Introduction
 1. Magic and Religion
 2. Definition and Function of Magic
 - B. The Magical Experience and View of the World
 1. Holistic Structure (the interconnectedness of humans, society, and nature) vs. Hierarchical Structure or Separate Domains
 2. Sympathetic Magic
 - a. Imitative
 - b. Contagious

C. The Nature of Ritual and Speech

2. Ancient Mesopotamian Culture and Religion
 - A. History
 - B. Gods
 - C. Temples
 - D. Ideology

Ancient Mesopotamian Magic: Survey

3. Magic and Magical Literature
 - A. Survey
 - B. Types of Documents
4. Magical Ceremonies (Examples)
5. Typology of Magical Activities
 - A. Magical Activities, Techniques, and Materials
 - B. Oral Rites: Prayers, Incantations, and Spells
 - C. Magic and Medicine
6. Evil
 - Images, Agencies, and Causes of Evil
 1. Gods
 2. Demons
 3. Personal God
 4. Ghosts and Death
 5. Evil Omens
 6. Curses
 7. Sin
 8. Witches

Ancient Mesopotamian Witchcraft

7. Witchcraft (Black or Destructive Magic) and a close reading of *Maqlû* and of selected rituals and oral rites from Abusch/Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Rituals*, volume 1-2 (Ancient Magic and Divination 8/1-2). Leiden: Brill, 2011, 2016.

Ancient Reflections

8. Theodicy: the Problem of Suffering

Magic in Other Cultures of Antiquity

9. Magic in Israel and Judaism

10. Magic in Late Antiquity

Readings by Topic:

Please note: It is my hope that we will cover the first six topics during the first month and that we will then devote the bulk of the semester to the reading of incantations against witchcraft (topic 7). As much as possible, try to coordinate your reading with the class lectures. But I am not unaware of the number of readings assigned for topics 1-6; accordingly, I do not object to your spacing of the reading of the assignments for topics 1-6 over the first two months of the course.

1 A. Introduction

Titiev, "A Fresh Approach to the Problem of Magic and Religion." Pp. 316-319 in *Reader in Comparative Religion: an Anthropological Approach*. Eds. Lessa and Vogt.

Glucklich, *The End of Magic*, Introduction ("What is Magic?"), pp. 3-14.

B. The Magical Experience

Frazer, "Sympathetic Magic." Pp. 300-315 in *Reader in Comparative Religion: an Anthropological Approach*. Eds. Lessa and Vogt.

Frankfort, ed., et al., *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, Ch. 1 ("Myth and Reality"), pp. 3-27.

C. The Nature of Ritual and Speech

Cunningham, *Religion and Magic: Approaches and Theories*, "Tambiah" (from Ch. 6: "Symbolic approaches"), pp. 67-71.

Primary sources:

Foster, *Before the Muses*, Girra: pp. 660-663; Ishtar: pp. 673-674; Nusku: pp. 717-720; Shamash: pp.751-752; Sexual Potency: p. 1002; Witchcraft: pp. 996-999, 962.

2. Ancient Mesopotamian Culture and Religion

Abusch, "Sacrifice in Mesopotamia." Pp. 39-48 in *Sacrifice in Religious Experience*.

Ed. Baumgarten.

Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 7-24.

Cryer and Thomsen, *Witchcraft and Magic*, pp. 3-23.

Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, pp. 1-91.

Primary sources:

Foster, *Before the Muses*, The Story of the Flood: pp. 227-253; Anzu, The Bird Who Stole Destiny: pp. 555-556, 561-578.

Ancient Mesopotamian Magic: Survey

3. Magic and Magical Literature

A.-B. Description: Survey & Types of Documents

Abusch, "Magic." To appear in *Handbook of Ancient Mesopotamia* (The Ancient Mesopotamian Civilization). Ed. Rubio, pp. 1-14, 32-33.

Farber, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Mesopotamia." Pp. 1895-1909 in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, Vol. 3. Eds. Sasson, et al.

Cryer and Thomsen, *Witchcraft and Magic*, pp. 56-90.

*Heessel, "Diagnosis, Divination and Disease: Towards an Understanding of the Rationale Behind the Babylonian Diagnostic Handbook." Pp. 97-116 in *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine*. Eds. Horstmanshoff and Stol.

Primary sources:

*Required of graduate students; recommended, but not required of all others.

Caplice, *The Akkadian Namburbi Texts: An Introduction*, section B "Texts in Translation," pp. 14-24.

4. **Magical Ceremonies (Examples)**

Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature*, Ch. 7: "An Early Form of the Witchcraft Ritual *Maqlû* and the Origin of a Babylonian Magical Ceremony", section III: "The Short Morning Version of *Maqlû*: An Explication," pp. 122-134. (originally = Pp. 12-24 in *Lingering Over Words*. Eds. Abusch, Huehnergard, and Steinkeller.)

Abusch/Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Rituals*, volume 1, pp.

5. **Typology of Magical Activities**

A. Magical Activities, Techniques, and Materials

Caplice, *The Akkadian Namburbi: An Introduction*, section 2: "The ritual," pp. 9-13.

Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature*, sections §4-5 in Ch. 14 ("*Maqlû*: A Schematic Summary"), pp. 288-289. [originally = Pp. 348-349 (sections 4-5) in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archaeologie* 7.]

B. Oral Rites: Prayers, Incantations, and Spells

Abusch, "Prayers, Hymns, Incantations, and Curses: Mesopotamia." Pp. 353-355 in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*. Ed. Johnston.

*Abusch, "Blessing and Praise in Ancient Mesopotamian Incantations." Pp. 1-14 in *Literatur, Politik und Recht in Mesopotamien: Festschrift für Claus Wilcke*. Eds. Sallaberger and Zgoll.

Abusch, "A Paean and Petition to a God of Death: Some Comments on a *Šuilla* to Nergal." Pp. 15-28 in *From the Four Corners of the Earth. Studies in*

Iconography and Cultures of the Ancient Near East in Honour of F.A.M. Wiggermann. Eds. D. Kertai and O. Nieuwenhuys.

Abusch, "The Form and Meaning of a Babylonian Prayer to Marduk," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983): 3-15.

*Abusch, "The Form and History of a Babylonian Prayer to Nabû." Pp. 169-182 in *"The Scaffolding of Our Thoughts": Essays on Assyriology and the History of Science in Honor of Francesca Rochberg*. Eds. Crisostomo, et al.

Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature*, Ch. 17 ("Love Magic and Potency Incantations"), pp. 193-210.

*Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, "4. Ritual Tablets," pp. 299-307 (295-299 recommended as well).

Primary sources:

Foster, *Before the Muses*, pp. 636-766 (read prayers to 13 deities).

Foster, *Before the Muses*, pp. 954-1014 (read 13 sections of incantations).

C. Magic and Medicine

Abusch, "Illnesses and Other Crises: Mesopotamia." Pp. 456-459 in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*. Ed. Johnston.*

Biggs, "Medicine, Surgery and Public Health in Ancient Mesopotamia." Pp. 1911-1924 in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Vol. 3. Eds. Sasson, et al.

Kinnier Wilson, "Mental Diseases of Ancient Mesopotamia." Pp. 723-733 in *Diseases in Antiquity*. Eds. Brothwell and Sandison.

*Ritter, "Magical-Expert (=Ašipu) and Physician (=Asû). Notes on Two Complementary Professions in Babylonian Medicine." Pp. 299-321 in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-fifth Birthday, April 21, 1965*. Eds. Güterbock and Jacobsen.

Primary sources:

Abusch and Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Rituals*, vol. 1, pp. 83-85, and 91-95.

6. **Evil: Images, Agencies, and Causes of Evil**

Abusch, "Magic." To appear in *Handbook of Ancient Mesopotamia* (The Ancient Mesopotamian Civilization). Ed. Rubio, pp. 14-33

A. **Gods**

Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, pp. 12-13.

Primary sources:

Foster, *Before the Muses*, Atrahasis: pp. 227-253; Erra: pp. 880-911.

B. **Demons**

Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*. Locate and read five entries that treat evil forces.

Riley, "Demon," parts II, in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Eds. van der Toorn, et al.

Hutter, "Lilith," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Eds. van der Toorn, et al.

Toorn, van der. "The Theology of Demons in Mesopotamia and Israel. Popular Belief and Scholarly Speculation." Pp 61-83 in *Die Dämonen—Demons*, Ed. Armin Lange et al.

*Wiggermann, "Lamaštu, Daughter of Anu, a Profile." Pp. 217-252 in *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting* by M. Stol.

*Wiggermann, "The Mesopotamian Pandemonium. A Provisional Census." *SMSR* 77/2: 298-322.

Primary sources:

Geller, *Evil Demons: Canonical Utukkū Lemnūtu Incantations*, pp. 203-225 (=Tablets 4-7).

*Finkel, "A Study in Scarlet: Incantations Against Samana." Pp. 71-106 in *Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994*. Ed. Maul.

Foster, *Before the Muses*, Lamaštu: pp. 76, 173-174; Other Demons: pp. 64, 175, 963, 966, 987-989.

C. Personal God

Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, "Mesopotamian 'Psychology'", pp. 198-206.

Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, pp. 147-164.

Abusch, "Ghost and God: Some Observations on a Babylonian Understanding of Human Nature." Pp. 363-383 in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*. Eds. Baumgarten, et al.

Primary sources:

Foster, *Before the Muses*, pp. 148-150, 721-722, 763-765.

D. Ghosts and Death

Abusch, "Etemmu," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Eds. van der Toorn, et al.

Katz, "Death, the Afterlife, and Other Last Things: Mesopotamia." Pp. 477-479 in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*. Ed. Johnston.

*Farber, "How to Marry a Disease: Epidemics, Contagion, and a Magic Ritual Against the 'Hand of the Ghost'." Pp. 117-132 in *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine*. Eds. Horstmanshoff and Stol.

Primary sources:

Foster, *Before the Muses*, pp. 731-732b, 990-991.

E. Evil Omens

Caplice, *The Akkadian Namburbi Texts: An Introduction*, section A "Introduction," pp. 7-13.

Maul, "How the Babylonians Protected Themselves against Calamities Announced by Omens." Pp. 123-129 in *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretive Perspectives*. Eds. Abusch and van der Toorn.

Primary sources:

Caplice, *The Akkadian Namburbi Texts: An Introduction*, section B "Texts in Translation," pp. 14-24.

Foster, *Before the Muses*, pp. 646b-647.

F. Curses

Primary sources:

Reiner, *Šurpu*, Tablet III: pp. 19-24.

Reiner, "Lipsur Litanies," *JNES* 15 (1956): 129ff.

Foster, *Before the Muses*, pp. 732-733.

G. Sin

Primary sources:

Foster, *Before the Muses*, pp. 645-646b, 722-725, 1003-1004.

Lambert, "DINGIR ŠÀ.DIB.BA," *JNES* 33 (1974): 267-305.

H. Witches

Macfarlane, "Definitions of Witchcraft." Pp. 41-44 in *Witchcraft and Sorcery: Selected Readings*. Ed. Marwick.

Mayer, "Witches." Pp. 45-64 in *Witchcraft and Sorcery: Selected Readings*. Ed. Marwick.

Abusch, "Witchcraft Literature in Mesopotamia." Pp. 374-386 in *The Babylonian World*. Ed. Leick.

E. Zomer, "Zauberei (witchcraft). A. In Mesopotamien." Pp. 222-224 in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, vol 15, fasc. 3/4 (2017).

Cryer and Thomsen, *Witchcraft and Magic*, pp. 23-56.

Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature*, Ch. 2 ("Witchcraft and the Anger of the Personal God"), pp. 27-63. (originally = Pp. 83-121 in *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspectives*. Eds. Abusch and van der Toorn.)

Primary sources:

Foster, *Before the Muses*, pp. 188, 660-662, 666-667, 673-674b, 720, 729a, 735-737, 743-744a, 996-999.

Lambert, "An Incantation of the Maqlû Type," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 18 (1957-8): 288-299.

7. *Ancient Mesopotamian Witchcraft*

Witchcraft (Black or Destructive Magic) and a close reading of *Maqlû* and of selected rituals and oral rites against witchcraft.

Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature*, Ch. 14 ("Maqlû: A Schematic Summary"), pp. 287-292. [originally = Pp. 346-351 in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archaeologie* 7.]

Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature*, Ch. 6 ("Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Literature: Texts and Studies, Part I: The Nature of Maqlû: Its Character, Divisions, and Calendrical Setting"), pp. 99-111. (originally = *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 33 (1974): 251-262).

Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature*, Ch. 11 ("The Socio-Religious Framework of the Babylonian Witchcraft Ceremony Maqlû Part I"), pp. 219-247. (originally = Pp. 1-34 in *Riches Hidden in Secret Places: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobsen*. Ed. T. Abusch.)

Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature*, Ch.12 ("The Socio-Religious Framework of the Babylonian Witchcraft Ceremony Maqlû Part II"), pp. 249-270. (originally = Pp. 467-494 in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*. Eds. Zevit, Gitin, and Sokoloff.)

Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature*, Ch. 13 ("Ascent to the Stars in Mesopotamian Ritual: Social Metaphor and Religious Experience"), pp. 271-286. (originally = Pp. 15-39 in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*. Eds. Collins and Fishbane.)**

Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature*, Ch. 1 ("The Demonic Image of the Witch in Standard Babylonian Literature: The Reworking of Popular Conceptions by Learned Exorcists"), pp. 3-25. (originally = Pp. 27-58 in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*. Eds. Neusner, et al.)

Primary sources:

Abusch, *The Witchcraft Series Maqlû* (Writings From the Ancient World, vol. 37). Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2015.

Abusch and Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Rituals*, vols. 1 (Ancient Magic and Divination 8/1) and vol. 2 (Ancient Magic and Divination 8/2).

Theoretical Retrospective

Van Binsbergen and Wiggermann, "Magic in History: A Theoretical Perspective, and its Application to Ancient Mesopotamia." Pp. 3-34 in *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspectives*. Eds. Abusch and van der Toorn.