



## **CLAS/HIST/REL 345 - Pagans and Christians: Ancient Mediterranean Religions**

### **Course Syllabus**

### **Spring Semester 2020**

**Instructor:** Alessandro Celani, Ph.D.

**Credits:** 3

**Contact Hours:** 45

**Prerequisites:** None

**Class Meeting:** TBA

**Office Hours:** TBA

**Course Type:** Standard Course

**Lab/Site-Visits Fee:** 100 €

### **Course Description**

Religion has always been central in any community. It has been regulating and organizing social relationships, affecting cultural and economical development, providing the individuals with a sharper sense of the self. It has been used and abused by any category of rulers, statesmen, leaders. On the other hand, it seems to be deeply rooted in the social strata the less related to power.

This course provides a social and cultural history of Ancient Mediterranean religions, with a special focus on Greece, Rome, and Christianity. This broad field is approached with different types of documents, as well as with several methodologies. With this in mind, the course is organized along two parallel schematic itineraries: chronological and thematic.

The first aspect to be analyzed will be the concept of religion as documented by the ancient Mediterranean societies and constructed around the triad of myth, ritual, and history. How those three factors cooperate in creating a religious sense is an open question. How they work differently, in the Greek, Roman, and Christian religions, will be analyzed and discussed. Secondly, Stoicism, Epicurean, and Platonic philosophy will be re-considered in relation to their role as pioneers of new concepts—the self in relation to society and the self in relation to divinity—concepts that were eventually borrowed and developed further by early Christians.

The three major religious systems will also be thematically approached, focusing on some of the major aspects of them, such as: the place: temples, shrines, churches, and basilicas; the ritual, Greek and Roman sacrifices vs. Christian liturgy; the myth: the Greek epic, the Roman oral tradition, the Christian gospels; other central religious experiences in life: birth, initiation, rites of transition, death; and beliefs and conceptions of afterlife.

The last part of the course will deal with the construction of the Christian individual as a type, first classified as illegal, then tolerated within society, and finally seen as one with power. The discussion will conclude with an examination of the transition from the typical Christian to the Christian leader. In this section, Constantine will be the centre of the discussion, intended as both an exponent of ancient culture and the founder of a new way of

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exercising power and social predominance. Themes of rupture and continuity will be the main organizing elements in this concluding section, with much attention paid to ceremony and iconography.

### **Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures**

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

#### **Learning Outcomes**

Acquire a sophisticated and in-depth understanding of the history of Ancient Mediterranean Religions

Gain knowledge of the main religious and philosophical concepts

Acquire familiarity with and be able to analyze different kinds of documents: images, inscriptions and literary texts.

#### **Assessment Measures**

*Course requirements that will be used to assess students' achievement for each learning outcome*

Midterm Exam  
Final Paper

Participation  
Midterm Exam  
Final Paper

Participation  
Midterm Exam  
Final Paper

### **Course Materials**

#### Readings

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available at a local copy shop for ... €.

### **Assessment**

Mid-term Test	30%
Reflection Paper	30%
Research Paper and Oral Presentation	30%
Participation	10%

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## Grading

Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	
B	83% - 86%	Superior
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	
C	73% - 76%	Satisfactory
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	
D	63% - 66%	Low Pass
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

## Course Requirements:

Grades are based on:

*Mid-term Test (30%).* The Mid-term test will consist of short questions about the arguments treated during the first part of the course, identification of pictures representing images shown during class lectures or seen during field visits.

*Reflection Paper (30%).* The Reflection paper will focus on in class discussions and material presented to the students. Students will be asked to write a critical essay on one of the course experiences (films, field trips, video material, etc.) and put them in relation to their own experience. The aim of this paper is to incorporate the course materials into the personal experience of the students and make them aware of connections between the past and the present.

*Research Paper and Oral Presentation (30%).* The purpose of writing a research paper is to clearly communicate what the students have learned through their research. Their research must have a clearly defined question, which they set out to answer in their paper, providing the necessary arguments and evidence for their conclusions. According to school policy, they cannot present the same paper for two (or more) different courses. This will be evaluated with a grade of "F."

*Participation (10%).* Participation is an active part of the class work. Students are expected to interact as much as they can with teacher and classmates. The lecturer will engage students in discussions, activities and field visits during class time.

## Additional Course Information

The length of the paper should be at least seven pages. Papers must be typed, written in a clear and cogent style, and include documentation of sources of information in proper footnotes. The purpose of an oral presentation is to share with the class the goal, method and results of the research paper. There is no set format students should use.

- Handwritten papers are not accepted.
- Late papers may not be accepted.

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- If a late final paper is accepted, then one letter grade will be deducted for the first week (or partial week) of delay in handing in the final paper.
- Plagiarism will result in a grade of “F” for the course. Please consult the student handbook for the definition of plagiarism and the policies followed by the Institute in the case of plagiarism.
- All papers should have a pertinent bibliography. Websites must be cited as references. More weight and positive evaluation will be given to book references than to internet/website references.

#### Attendance Policy

Class attendance is **mandatory**. Students are allowed **two “free” absences**, which do not need to be justified. **It is the students’ responsibility to keep them in case of real necessity (sickness or any other unforeseen inconvenience that may prevent students from being in class)**. Each additional absence, unless for a very serious reason, will lower the students’ grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. It is also the policy of the Institute that any student who has eight or more absences automatically fails the class.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. **Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason.** Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important for student performance in class. Missing a mandatory field trip, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to the professor and Umbra Academic Director in a timely manner, will lower students’ final grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

#### Academic Integrity

All forms of **cheating** (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and **plagiarism** (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

#### Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate **respect** for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that **cell phones** must be turned off before the beginning of each class. **Computers and other electronic devices** cannot be used during class lectures and discussions.

## Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

### WEEK 1

*Introduction to the course. Methods and themes.*

#### Readings

Johnston, pp. 3-15

*Mediterranean Religions. Monotheism and Polytheism. Religion as an expression of socio-economic organizations (History, Sociology, Anthropology)*

#### Readings

Johnston, pp. 17-31

### WEEK 2

*The Greek Mythology in its formation and developments. The myth as an adaptable language. (Visual Arts, Literature, Archaeology)*

#### Readings

Burkert, pp. 119-125; 199-208; and 218-222

*The Greek Ritual: individual, community and the sacred sphere. Changeable and persistent elements in the Mediterranean rituality (Ethnology, Anthropology, Religion)*

#### Readings

Burkert, pp. 54-64; 75-79; and 82-84

#### Field trip to Assisi

### WEEK 3

*The Greek sacred place: sanctuaries, temples, shrines, altars. The community and the space. (Archaeology, Architecture, Art, Religion)*

#### Readings

Burkert, pp. 84-98

*The Images of the Gods. Anthropomorphism as an expression of humanism. (History, Art, Religion, Sociology)*

Readings

Burkert, pp. 182-189; 125-131; and 149-152

**WEEK 4**

*Religious implications of the Greek Philosophy. The growth of the city-state and the collapse of the traditional religion. (Philosophy, Religion, History)*

Readings

Burkert, pp. 305-311; 321-325; and 332-337

*The Religion of the Mysteries: first developments of an intercultural religion. The influence of long distance communications and multi-culturalism on religion. (History, Sociology, Geography)*

Readings

Burkert, pp. 276-295

**Field Trip to Spoleto and Assisi**

**WEEK 5**

*Forms and functions of the Roman Mythology. An introduction. (History, Sociology, Archaeology, Religion)*

Readings

Ruepke pp. 39-45; and 50-61.

*The Roman Calendar and the New Year festivals. Modern approaches to the Early Roman society. (Epigraphy, Archaeology, Anthropology, Ethnology)*

Readings

Ruepke pp. 186-201; and 90-106

**WEEK 6**

Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Medea*

Film Screening (I)

A film on ancient Myth and Ritual

Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Medea*

Film Screening (II)

A film on ancient Myth and Ritual

**WEEK 7**

*Review Session*

MIDTERM EXAM

**SEMESTER BREAK**

**WEEK 8**

*The Roman temples and the Italic background. Peculiarities of the Roman sacred spaces. (Archaeology, Epigraphy, Architecture)*

Readings

Ruepke pp. 174-185

*The Myth of the foundation of Rome. (History, Religion, Literature, Art)*

Readings

No reading from the course packet

Field trip to Florence

**WEEK 9**

*Foreign cults in Rome. Tolerance of diversity and forms of integration. (History, Religion, Archaeology)*

Readings

Ruepke pp. 238-257

*Early Christian sources: Orthodoxy vs. Heresy. (Historiography, Archaeology, Epigraphy)*

Readings

Humphries pp. 158-185

**WEEK 10**

*The Historical Jesus and the movements of rebellion in the Roman middle East. (Archaeology, History, Sociology)*

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Readings

Humphries pp. 97-124

*The Early Christian Rituality. The growth of the Symbolism. (Art, Literature, Architecture, Religion)*

Readings

Humphries pp. 142-158

**WEEK 11**

Pier Paolo Pasolini, *The Passion according to St. Matthew*

Film Screening (I)

Pier Paolo Pasolini, *The Passion according to St. Matthew*

Film Screening (II)

**WEEK 12**

*The Persecutions and the relations between Christians and Romans. (History, Epigraphy, Literature)*

Readings

Humphries pp. 186-224

*Constantine and his time: the birth of the Imperial Church. (History, Politics, Literature, Architecture)*

Readings

Humphries pp. 34-40

**WEEK 13**

*Oral Presentation and discussion of research papers*

*Oral Presentation and discussion of research papers*

**WEEK OF FINAL EXAMS AND SPECIAL ACADEMIC EVENTS**

Apr.,  
27-30

The Final Exam and Special Academic Events Calendar will be provided later in the semester.

## Bibliography

- P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, London 1971.
- C. R. Wittaker, *The Frontiers of the Roman Empire. A Social and Economic Study*, Baltimore 1994.
- Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire*, Cambridge Mass. 1993.
- T. S. Burns, *The History of Ostrogoths*, Bloomington 1984.
- W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*, Princeton 1980.
- R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, Baltimore 1975.
- P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Cambridge Mass. 1978.
- P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 1982.
- S. G. MacCormak, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 1981.
- P. Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago 1982.
- M. Humphries, *Early Christianity*, Routledge, London – New York, 2006.
- M. Pallottino, *History of Earliest Italy*, London 1991. (Textbook)
- T. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, Routledge, London – New York, 1995.
- Malkin, *The Returns of Odysseus: Colonization and Ethnicity*, California University Press 1998.
- W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, Harvard University Press, 1987.
- J. Rüpke, *The Religion of the Romans*, Polity Press, 2007.