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## Term Information

Effective Term Autumn 2017

## General Information

Course Bulletin Listing/Subject Area Religious Studies  
Fiscal Unit/Academic Org Comparative Studies - D0518  
College/Academic Group Arts and Sciences  
Level/Career Undergraduate  
Course Number/Catalog 2222  
Course Title From Ishtar to Christ: The History of Mediterranean Religions  
Transcript Abbreviation IstarChristMedRel  
Course Description This course introduces students to the historical facts of 10 ancient Mediterranean religions in a context that trains them to study religions more generally. It also teaches them how to two of the most prominent religions today--Judaism and Christianity--succeeded within a richly diverse religious marketplace, and how religions respond to their political, economic, and social environments.  
Semester Credit Hours/Units Fixed: 3

## Offering Information

Length Of Course 14 Week  
Flexibly Scheduled Course Never  
Does any section of this course have a distance education component? No  
Grading Basis Letter Grade  
Repeatable No  
Course Components Lecture  
Grade Roster Component Lecture  
Credit Available by Exam No  
Admission Condition Course No  
Off Campus Never  
Campus of Offering Columbus

## Prerequisites and Exclusions

Prerequisites/Corequisites  
Exclusions Not open to students with credit for Classics 2222

## Cross-Listings

Cross-Listings Cross-listed in Classics

## Subject/CIP Code

Subject/CIP Code 38.0201  
Subsidy Level Baccalaureate Course  
Intended Rank Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior

## Requirement/Elective Designation

General Education course:  
Historical Study

The course is an elective (for this or other units) or is a service course for other units

## Course Details

### **Course goals or learning objectives/outcomes**

- Students will acquire the analytical and comparative skills that are necessary for understanding religions in the ancient Mediterranean as a fluid set of beliefs and practices.
- Students will learn how religious beliefs and practices affected political, military and economic decisions and how they gave rise to literary and artistic products that still influence our cultures today.
- Students will understand religions and their relationships to other aspects of cultures from a historical perspective more generally, including those of the contemporary world.

### **Content Topic List**

- The history of ancient Mediterranean religions from about 1500 BCE to 200 CE
- How religions interact with one another and change in response
- Subtopics such as ancient beliefs concerning the afterlife, the creation of the world, how god(s) dispense justice
- How ancient Mediterranean religions affected, and were affected by, the political, economic and social systems of the cultures in which they arose

## Attachments

- From\_Ishtar\_to\_Christ\_syllabus\_proposal (1).docx: syllabus  
*(Syllabus. Owner: Marsch, Elizabeth)*
- Ishtar\_to\_Christ\_GE Assessment Plan (1).docx: GE Assessment  
*(GEC Course Assessment Plan. Owner: Marsch, Elizabeth)*
- Ishtar\_to\_Christ\_History\_GE Rationale.docx: GE Rationale  
*(GEC Model Curriculum Compliance Stmt. Owner: Marsch, Elizabeth)*
- Otter\_History\_Concurrence\_Ishtar to Christ Assessment Plan.pdf: History concurrence  
*(Concurrence. Owner: Marsch, Elizabeth)*
- Van\_Bladel\_NELC\_Ishtar to Christ Concurrence.pdf: NELC concurrence  
*(Concurrence. Owner: Marsch, Elizabeth)*

## Comments

## Workflow Information

| Status           | User(s)  | Date/Time           | Step                   |
|------------------|--|---------------------|------------------------|
| Submitted        | Marsch, Elizabeth  | 01/24/2017 12:31 PM | Submitted for Approval |
| Approved         | Shank, Barry   | 01/24/2017 12:43 PM | Unit Approval          |
| Approved         | Heysel, Garrett Robert   | 01/27/2017 09:26 PM | College Approval       |
| Pending Approval | Nolen, Dawn<br>Vankeerbergen, Bernadette<br>Chantal<br>Hanlin, Deborah Kay<br>Jenkins, Mary Ellen Bigler | 01/27/2017 09:26 PM | ASCCAO Approval        |



Proposal for Classics 2222/RS2222:  
 From Ishtar to Christ:  
 The History of Ancient Mediterranean Religions  
 TuTh; 1hour and 20 minutes each day

Instructor: Sarah Iles Johnston  
 424 University Hall  
 johnston.2@osu.edu

Teaching Assistant: XXXXX

Office Hours: XXXXX

### Description

'From Ishtar to Christ' introduces students to the historical facts of ten ancient Mediterranean religious systems in a context that trains them to study religions more generally. Additionally, it helps them understand how two of the most prominent religions today – Judaism and Christianity – developed and succeeded within a richly diverse religious marketplace, and how religions respond to the political, economic and social environments in which they function.

The first part of the course offers historical overviews of the ten religious systems, with pauses to look at specific phenomena shared by those religions in order to start honing the students' abilities to compare religions in a sophisticated manner. The second part of the course is topical; beliefs and practices shared by some or all of these religions are examined, and the reasons that they were expressed differently in different cultures (or not expressed at all in some cases) are explored. In this part of the course, both the historical information and the comparative methodologies that were gained in the first part of the course will be put to use and more fully developed. By the end of the course, the students will have a 'toolkit' of approaches by which they can begin to responsibly study any religion within its historical milieu(x).

Course readings will include historically-oriented essays by leading scholars of the religions to be studied (i.e., essays that give the basic facts of how the religions originated and developed and what their main practices and tenets were); essays that explore the challenges of comparing religions; and primary sources in translation.

### Required Texts

- *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*. Ed. S.I. Johnston (Harvard University Press, 2004)
- *Gods, Heroes and Monsters: A Sourcebook of Greek, Roman and Near Eastern Myths in Translation*. Ed. C. López-Ruiz. (Oxford University Press 2013) Second Edition 2017.
- Supplemental readings as posted on Canvas

### General Education (GE) Historical Study

This course fulfills Ohio State's GE Historical Study requirement, whose expected goals and learning outcomes are as follows:

Students recognize how past events are studied and how they influence today's society and the human condition. 1. Students construct an integrated perspective on history and the factors that shape human activity. 2. Students describe and analyze the origins and nature of contemporary issues. 3. Students speak and write critically about primary and secondary historical sources by examining diverse interpretations of past events and ideas in their historical contexts.

This course will fulfill the Historical Studies GE by (1) providing the students with a 'toolkit' of methodologies by which they may responsibly study religions and their developments within different ancient time periods and cultures with attention to the political, economic, social and cultural factors that determined the forms that those religions took; (2) using the enhanced understanding of ancient religions to better understand why and how two of today's major religions – Judaism and Christianity – are rooted in certain beliefs and practices; (3) discussing these ideas in class and writing a term paper that demonstrates their ability to study and compare religions in a critically informed manner.

This course is also intended to teach students how to study different cultures' religions in a manner that enables them to see how those religions shared practices and beliefs but also adapted those practices and beliefs to suit the different contexts in which they were being used. We will look at a diversity of ways in which the concept of God/the gods and humanity's relationship to God/the gods could be imagined and acted upon. This will help us comprehend how people of differing backgrounds use religious beliefs and practices to make sense of the events that unfold around them. Reflecting upon these ideas will help the students better understand the religious choices that people in today's world make – including the choice of not believing in God/the gods at all. Overall, the course will also help students understand the crucial question of how groups' religious beliefs sometimes drive their military, political, economic and other

policies.

### 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://www.sja.osu.edu/page.asp?id=1>) .

## **DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT**

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. You are also welcome to register with Student Life Disability Services to establish reasonable accommodations. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); 614-292-3307; [slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu); 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

### Purposes

The purposes of this course are: to learn the basic facts about ancient religious systems; to understand something about how these religious systems developed in the directions

that they did; to consider how some of these systems have affected contemporary religious practices and beliefs; and to develop critical skills in reading ancient sources in translation and in responsibly comparing cultural practices – in this case, the beliefs and practices of ancient religions.

### Readings

Please be aware that, although we will discuss portions of the readings in class, we will not discuss everything you read and will often also discuss topics not covered in the readings. *Keeping up with both the readings and the class sessions is essential for success in this course.*

The Quizzes and Exam: Each quiz will consist of 15 multiple choice, true/false and short answer questions that draw on information the students obtained from assigned readings and class lectures and discussions. Each quiz covers materials studied during the weeks since the previous quiz. The final exam, which covers the entire semester's worth of readings and lectures, will consist of 20 multiple choice, true/false and short answer questions.

The Paper: Each student will write a paper of between 1400 and 1500 words (not including footnotes and bibliography). In the paper, the student will take up one of the three first theoretical pieces on studying religion that we read for class (by J.Z. Smith, Bruce Lincoln, Ivan Strenski) and apply it to a practice or belief as it is manifested by three of the religious systems we have studied, not including religious systems whose versions of that practice or belief we have studied in class. For example, a student might decide to apply Strenski's ideas to the practices of divination in Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome. Students may use those portions of *RAWG* that we did not read for class assignments in choosing the practice or belief and the systems on which they will focus but students are strongly encouraged to consult additional scholarly resources such as they will find cited in articles in *RAWG* or through library searches. The paper should make it clear that the student has thought carefully about how to apply the theoretical approach to the materials they have chosen, as well as that they have been able to come to a better understanding of the practice or belief itself as it is manifested in the three cultures. Good grammar, syntax, spelling and ability to express one's ideas *do* count towards the final grade on the paper.

### Writing Ability

If you are concerned that your writing is not proficient enough, both technically and conceptually, to succeed in a 2000-level history course, contact the Writing

Center: <http://www.cstw.osu.edu> . I will grade down for poor grammar and other technical errors as well as content problems.

### Grading

I may consider improvement when determining final grades. The breakdown is: A: 93 and above; A-: 89-92; B+: 87-88; B: 82-86; B-: 79-82; C+: 77-78; C: 72-76 C-: 69-72; D+: 67-68 D: 62-66; E: below 62.

Your grade will be based on the following assignments. I may adjust a borderline grade either up or down depending on active participation in class discussions. Each grade is expressed as a number of points. Each point equals 1% of your grade in the class.

|            |   |      |
|------------|---|------|
| Quizzes    | 4 at 15 points each; lowest score dropped | =45% |
| Paper      |   | =35% |
| Final exam |   | =20% |

### Topics and Readings Assignments

'RAWG' = *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*

'GHM' = *Gods, Heroes and Men*

The readings are to be done *before* the class session for which they are assigned.

#### √Week One:

Tuesday: Introduction to Studying Ancient Mediterranean Religions and the Comparative Enterprise. From RAWG, read the Introduction and 'What Is Ancient Mediterranean Religion?' by Fritz Graf. On Canvas, read J.Z. Smith, 'In Comparison a Magic Dwells.'

Thursday: Historical Survey of Egyptian Religion. Read RAWG, 'Egypt,' by Jan Assmann and David Frankfurter, RAWG 350-53 ('Prayers, Hymns, Incantations and Curses, Egypt'), and RAWG 578-79 ('Myth and Sacred Narratives: Egypt') plus some excerpts from ancient texts on Canvas.

#### √Week Two:

Tuesday: Historical Survey of Mesopotamian Religion. Read RAWG, 'Mesopotamia' by Paul-Alain Beaulieu, RAWG pages 330-32 ('Sacrifices, Offerings and Votives: Mesopotamia') and RAWG 580-81 ('Myths and Sacred Narratives: Mesopotamia') plus some excerpts from ancient texts on Canvas.



Thursday: Historical Survey of Syrian and Canaanite Religions. Read *RAWG*, 'Syria and Canaan,' by David P. Wright, *RAWG* pages 332-333 ('Sacrifices, Offerings and Votives: Syria-Canaan'), and *RAWG* pages 354-355 ('Prayers, Hymns, Incantations and Curses, Syria-Canaan').

√Week Three:

Tuesday: Historical Survey of Israelite religion . Read *RAWG*, 'Israel,' by John J. Collins, *RAWG* pages 256-8 ('Sacred Times and Spaces: Israel'), *RAWG* pages 333-35 ('Sacrifices, Offerings and Votives: Israel') and *RAWG* pages 402-4 ('Deities and Demons: Israel') plus some excerpts from ancient texts on Canvas.

Thursday: Practicing Comparison, Test Case #1: Sacred Times and Spaces. Read *RAWG*, pages 243-50 ('Sacred Times and Spaces: Egypt'), *RAWG* pages 250-255 ('Sacred Times and Spaces: Mesopotamia'), and *RAWG* pages 259-63 ('Sacred Times and Spaces: Anatolia'). Review other entries on Sacred Times and Spaces.

Week Four:

Tuesday: **QUIZ 1** over Weeks 1-3, followed by lecture: Historical Survey of Hittite and Iranian religions. Read *RAWG*, 'Anatolia: Hittites,' by David P. Wright and *RAWG* 'Iran,' by William Malandra and Michael Stausberg, and *GHM* 3.4, 3.5 and 6.6.

Thursday: Historical Survey of Greek religions. Read *RAWG*, 'Greece,' by Jon Mikalson, *RAWG* pages 408-412 ('Deities and Demons: Greece'), *RAWG* pages 340-43 ('Sacrifice, Offerings and Votives: Greece') and *RAWG* pages 590-93 ('Myth and Sacred Narratives: Greece and Rome'), plus some excerpts from ancient texts on Canvas. **Due today: a 200-word description of what you intend to write your final paper on.**

√Week Five:

Tuesday: Historical Survey of Etruscan religions. Read *RAWG* 'Etruria,' by Olivier de Cazanove, *RAWG* pages 413-15 ('Deities and Demons: Etruria') and *RAWG* pages 386-7 ('Divination and Prophecy: Etruria').

Thursday: Practicing Comparison, Test Case #2: Deities and Demons. Read *RAWG* 'Monotheism and Polytheism' by Jan Assmann in *RAWG*, and review the pages you have read in the past few weeks on deities and demons in the different religious systems, plus the introductory essay on pages 392-3 of *RAWG* and the essay on Egyptian deities and demons on *RAWG* pages 393-5. On Canvas, Ivan Strenski, 'Actually, You Can Compare Apples to Oranges: Secrets of Successful

## Comparison of Myths.'

### √Week Six:

Tuesday: Historical Survey of Roman religions. Read RAWG 'Rome' by John North, RAWG pages 547-8 and RAWG 558-7 ('Religion and Politics: Introduction' and 'Religion and Politics: Rome and Christianity') RAWG pages 564 and 572-77 ('Controlling Religion: Introduction' and 'Controlling Religion: Rome and Christianity') plus some excerpts from ancient texts on Canvas.

Thursday: Overview of Early Christianity. Read RAWG 'Early Christianity,' by Harold W. Attridge, RAWG pages 347-8 ('Sacrifices, Offerings and Votives: Christianity'), RAWG pages 594-6 ('Myth and Sacred Narratives: Christianity') and RAWG pages 637-39 ('Sacred Texts and Canonicity: Christianity') plus some excerpts from ancient texts on Canvas.

### √Week Seven:

Tuesday: Practicing Comparison, Test Case #3: Sacrifices and Offerings. Read RAWG 'Ritual' by Jan Bremmer, review the essays on sacrifices and offerings in different religious systems that you have read so far and read the introduction 'Sacrifices, Offerings and Votives' on RAWG pages 235-6. On Canvas, Bruce Lincoln, 'Theses on Comparison.'

Thursday: **QUIZ 2** over Weeks 4-7 followed by lecture: Standing Back and Looking at What We Have so Far: The challenges and rewards of large-scale comparison.

### √Week Eight:

Tuesday: How to Cope with a Difficult Life, Part One: Responses to Illness. Read RAWG 'Illnesses and Other Crises,' pages 452-69 plus some excerpts from ancient texts on Canvas.

Thursday: How to Cope with a Difficult Life, Part Two: Prayers and Curses. Read RAWG 'Prayers, Hymns, Incantations and Curses,' pages 349-69 plus some excerpts from ancient texts on Canvas. **Due today: a 700-word rough draft of your paper**

### √Week Nine:

Tuesday: Your Religion is My Magic: Practices, Borrowing and Problems of Definition, Part One. Read 'Magic' by S. I. Johnston in RAWG, plus some excerpts from ancient texts on Canvas.

Thursday: Your Religion is My Magic: Practices, Borrowing and Problems of Definition, Part Two. Read on Canvas some excerpts from ancient texts.

√Week Ten:

Tuesday: Preparing for Life: Rites of Passage, Part One. Read 'Rites of Passage' pages 438-51 in *RAWG* plus read on Canvas, Fritz Graf, 'Initiation: A Concept with a Troubled History'

Thursday: Preparing for Life: Rites of Passage, Part Two. No new readings.

√Week Eleven:

Tuesday: **QUIZ 3** over Weeks 8-10 followed by lecture Preparing for Death: Rituals for the Dead, and for the Living. Read 'Death, the Afterlife and Other Last Things' in *RAWG* pages 470-95.

Thursday: Preparing for Death: What Lies Beyond? Read 'Mysteries,' by S. I. Johnston in *RAWG*; *GHM* 425-30 plus 6.1, 6.2, 6.5, 6.7, 6.8 6.9.

√Week Twelve:

Tuesday: Sin and Pollution, Purity and Atonement. Read 'Pollution, Sin, Atonement, Salvation,' by Harold W. Attridge in *RAWG*.

Thursday: Sin and Pollution, Purity and Atonement. Read 'Sin, Pollution and Purity' in *RAWG* pages 496-513 plus some excerpts from ancient texts on Canvas.

√Week Thirteen:

Tuesday: Sacred Stories, Part One. Read 'Myth' by Fritz Graf in *RAWG* and review the portions of 'Myth and Sacred Narratives' and 'Sacred Texts and Canonicity' from *RAWG* that we have read for earlier class sessions.

Thursday: Sacred Stories, Part Two. On Canvas read S. I Johnston, 'The Role of Myths in Creating and Sustaining Religious Beliefs' plus *GHM* 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10.b,

√Week Fourteen:

Tuesday: How it all Began: Read in *RAWG* 'Cosmology: Time and History,' by John J. Collins; From *GHM* read the Introduction to Part One, 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, the introduction to Part Two, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6.

Thursday: **QUIZ 4** followed by Wrap-up discussion. Read Bruce Lincoln, 'Epilogue' in *RAWG*.

The paper is due on XXXXX by XX:00

Our final exam will be held at the time and day assigned by the university: XXXXX at  
XX:00

## **GE Rationale: History**

### ***a. How do the course objectives address the GE category expected learning outcomes?***

This course teaches the analytical and comparative skills that are necessary for understanding religions in the ancient Mediterranean as a fluid set of beliefs and practices out of which different cultures at different periods within a 2000-year-long span developed systems that expressed their understanding of causality within the world, the nature of human existence and the reasons for that nature, the relationship of mortals to non-mortal entities and how those relationships could be nurtured for the benefit of humans, the inescapability of death, and what awaited one afterwards. The students will also learn how religious beliefs and practices affected political, military and economic decisions and how they gave rise to literary and artistic products that still influence our cultures today, and will begin to understand the environment in which two religions that are still highly popular and influential today – Judaism and Christianity – adapted themselves to succeed in a crowded marketplace of religious options. All of these skills will help students understand religions and their relationships to other aspects of cultures from a historical perspective more generally, including those of the contemporary world.

### ***b. How do the readings assigned address the GE category expected learning outcomes?***

The readings selected for this course can be divided into three types (1) essays providing the facts of ancient religions – what their adherents did and believed (2) ancient sources in translation that enrich the students' understanding of those facts (e.g., ancient sacred texts and narratives) and (3) essays by leading scholars of religion today that present some of the most successful methodologies for studying religions within a critically comparative framework that helps students avoid assuming that any religion is 'normal' and the rest are to be measured by that 'normal' religion's yardstick. As such, the course also helps to prepare students to better discuss contemporary religions and the ways that they affect politics, economics and social issues.

### ***c. How do the topics address the GE category expected learning outcomes?***

The topics in the course, as shown on the syllabus, begin by introducing students to the histories of the ten religious systems to be studied, in order to give the students a firm basis from which to go into further detail during the latter part of the course, which is more explicitly comparative in design. In that second part, specific topics such as 'sacrifice,' 'divination,' and 'cosmology,' which were

touched on only briefly in the histories, are looked at in depth for some or all of the ten religious systems studied in the course, and the students are guided in developing methods to compare the ways in which the different systems expressed those phenomena. Throughout both the first and second parts of the course, important scholarly articles on methodologies of comparison within a historical framework will be read and then analyzed in class.

*d. How do the written assignments address the GE category expected learning outcomes?*

Students will hone their critical skills as historians and comparativists of ancient religions by writing a 1500-word paper that is due at the end of the course. In the paper, the students will choose one of the critical methodologies expressed by one of the scholarly articles read in class and apply it to the analysis of a phenomenon as manifested in three of the ancient religious systems studied—for example, divination as found in ancient Greece, ancient Roman and ancient Israel. (The cultures chosen should not have been studied apropos that phenomenon already in the course). Students are required to turn in a 200-word sketch of their paper topic at the end of Week 4, and a 700-word rough draft at the end of Week 8 so as to ensure that their final paper, due during finals week, will be as finished a product of thought and expression as possible.

*e. How does the course aim to sharpen students' response, judgment, and evaluation skills?*

Excellent skills of analysis and comparison are central to successful judgment and evaluation in all walks of life. Seldom are they more difficult to apply than when working with data concerning a topic as sensitive as religious beliefs. By leading students to hone their analytical and comparative skills against materials drawn both from the early periods of two of today's most prevalent religions (Judaism and Christianity) *and* religions that are now longer practiced, students will be compelled to reexamine some of their assumptions about how religious systems develop and how they interface with other important cultural systems (political, economic, etc.) Students will learn that the past is highly malleable and can be rearranged to encode different values, depending on which regime has the power to disseminate its message; they will learn to not take narratives (whether official or not) at face value but internalize the critical response of seeing them as more or less politicized options that promote specific values and interests; they will learn to always ask about the context and choices that shaped the creation of cultural products. In-class discussions and written assignments will require them to sharpen their ability to articulate these critical responses and develop their own vocabulary, imagery, and modes for expressing them.

**Assessment Plan for:  
Classics 2222/Religious Studies 2222  
From Ishtar to Christ: The History of Ancient Mediterranean Religions**

**GE: History**

**GE Goals and Expected Learning Outcomes: History.**

Submitted by Sarah Iles Johnston, Arts and Humanities Distinguished Professor of Religion, Professor of Classics and Professor of Comparative Studies (courtesy appointment, Professor of History).

**Goals for History GE courses:** Students recognize how past events are studied and how they influence today's society and the human condition.

**Expected Outcomes for History GE courses:**

1. Students construct an integrated perspective on history and the factors that shape human activity.
2. Students describe and analyze the origins and nature of contemporary issues.
3. Students speak and write critically about primary and secondary historical sources by examining diverse interpretations of past events and ideas in their historical contexts.

**GE Rationale: History**

*a. How do the course objectives address the GE category expected learning outcomes?*

This course teaches the analytical and comparative skills that are necessary for understanding religions in the ancient Mediterranean as a fluid set of beliefs and practices out of which different cultures at different periods within a 2000-year-long span developed systems that expressed their understanding of causality within the world, the nature of human existence and the reasons for that nature, the relationship of mortals to non-mortal entities and how those relationships could be nurtured for the benefit of humans, the inescapability of death, and what awaited one afterwards. The students will also learn how religious beliefs and practices affected political, military and economic decisions and how they gave rise to literary and artistic products that still influence our cultures today, and will begin to understand the environment in which two religions that are still highly popular and influential today – Judaism and Christianity – adapted themselves to succeed in a crowded marketplace of religious options. All of

these skills will help students understand religions and their relationships to other aspects of cultures from a historical perspective more generally, including those of the contemporary world.

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The readings selected for this course can be divided into three types (1) essays providing the facts of ancient religions – what their adherents did and believed (2) ancient sources in translation that enrich the students' understanding of those facts (e.g., ancient sacred texts and narratives) and (3) essays by leading scholars of religion today that present some of the most successful methodologies for studying religions within a critically comparative framework that helps students avoid assuming that any religion is 'normal' and the rest are to be measured by that 'normal' religion's yardstick. As such, the course also helps to prepare students to better discuss contemporary religions and the ways that they affect politics, economics and social issues.

***c. How do the topics address the GE category expected learning outcomes?***

The topics in the course, as shown on the syllabus, begin by introducing students to the histories of the ten religious systems to be studied, in order to give the students a firm basis from which to go into further detail during the latter part of the course, which is more explicitly comparative in design. In that second part, specific topics such as 'sacrifice,' 'divination,' and 'cosmology,' which were touched on only briefly in the histories, are looked at in depth for some or all of the ten religious systems studied in the course, and the students are guided in developing methods to compare the ways in which the different systems expressed those phenomena. Throughout both the first and second parts of the course, important scholarly articles on methodologies of comparison within a historical framework will be read and then analyzed in class.

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sketch of their paper topic at the end of Week 4, and a 700-word rough draft at the end of Week 8 so as to ensure that their final paper, due during finals week, will be as finished a product of thought and expression as possible.

*e. How does the course aim to sharpen students' response, judgment, and evaluation skills?*

Excellent skills of analysis and comparison are central to successful judgment and evaluation in all walks of life. Seldom are they more difficult to apply than when working with data concerning a topic as sensitive as religious beliefs. By leading students to hone their analytical and comparative skills against materials drawn both from the early periods of two of today's most prevalent religions (Judaism and Christianity) *and* religions that are now longer practiced, students will be compelled to reexamine some of their assumptions about how religious systems develop and how they interface with other important cultural systems (political, economic, etc.) Students will learn that the past is highly malleable and can be rearranged to encode different values, depending on which regime has the power to disseminate its message; they will learn to not take narratives (whether official or not) at face value but internalize the critical response of seeing them as more or less politicized options that promote specific values and interests; they will learn to always ask about the context and choices that shaped the creation of cultural products. In-class discussions and written assignments will require them to sharpen their ability to articulate these critical responses and develop their own vocabulary, imagery, and modes for expressing them.

**Direct methods of assessment** will include

- (a) Pre-course questionnaire (similar to a quiz); see Appendix 1. This is necessary in order to gauge the level of students' knowledge and awareness of the issues at the beginning of the course. It will be administered on the first day of class. It will be anonymous and not count towards their grade
- (b) Analysis of student writing assignments. See below for the analytical categories that will be used as the metrics of success.

**Indirect methods of assessment** will include

- (a) Two opinion surveys, one given in the middle of the course and one towards the end of the course. Students will be given the GE category Expected Learning Outcomes and asked to talk about them, explaining what progress they feel they have made toward them during the course and giving examples. These will help enable the instructor to ascertain whether students have been developed the ability to talk about the issues (as measured through the rankings given below).

**Metrics of success** to be used in the assessment of the papers:

*Not satisfactory:* 1. Student has not learned how to apply the analytical and comparative skills taught in the course. 2. Student is unfamiliar with the basic facts relevant to the topic he or she has chosen to write on.

*Basic:* 1. The student has grasped the basic analytical and comparative concepts but is unable to use them in nuanced and original ways to fit the specific material that he or she is treating. 2. The student has assembled most of the relevant facts about their topic and can say something about its place in the larger religious, political and social context.

*Intermediate:* 1. The student has understood the basic analytical and comparative concepts and can apply them nuanced and original ways to fit the specific material that he or she is treating. 2. The student has gathered relevant facts about the topic being treated and can use them in appropriate ways to understand how the phenomenon in question affected, and was affected by, other cultural phenomena.

*Advanced:* 1. The student has not only learned the basic analytical and comparative concepts presented in the class (at the *Intermediate* level) but learned more through observation and further study and has introduced novel applications of them in his or her analyses. 2. The student has not only attained *Intermediate* control of facts but also has produced original arguments and insights which reflect a more nuanced understanding of the topic and its place within the culture(s) in question.

**Success** will be met when at least 70% of the class reach the *Intermediate* level and at least 15% the *Advanced* level (the two groups not being exclusive).

**Description of follow-up/feedback processes:** At the end of the course, I will use an analysis of the papers and the level of improvement or change between the pre-course questionnaire and the two follow-up opinion surveys to identify problem areas and how I might change the course and the presentation of materials to insure better fulfillment of the GE expected learning outcomes.

## **Appendix:** Pre-course questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire will be to provide a pre-course baseline against which future progress, made during the course, can be measured. Its questions will target the ELOs of the History GE. It may, for example, include questions such as the following:

*Question:* Give the names of two gods or goddesses worshipped in any two ancient Mediterranean religions and in each case state what one of his or her main spheres of concern were.

*Question:* What is a 'rite of passage'?

*Question:* Explain the difference between the concept of 'sin' and the concept of 'pollution' as manifested in ancient Mediterranean religions

*Question:* Give an example of a common assumption about the soul's existence after death that is shared by most ancient Mediterranean religions.

*Question:* What was the first ancient religion with a strongly evangelical outlook?

*Question:* Name a striking difference between Judaism and Christianity, on the one hand, and most other ancient Mediterranean religions, on the other hand, and explain how this characteristic predisposed Judaism and Christianity to survive for more than two millennia.

*Question:* Give one reason that the Roman Empire persecuted the early Christians and offer an opinion as to how that characteristic still affects Christianity today.



## RE: Ishtar to Christ Assessment Plan

Otter, Christopher

To: Johnston, Sarah; van Bladel, Kevin T.

Tuesday, January 10, 2017 3:00 PM

- You replied on 1/10/2017 8:47 PM.

Sarah,

Concurrence is granted!

Chris

Christopher Otter  
Associate Professor  
Chair, Undergraduate Teaching Committee  
Department of History  
263 Dulles Hall  
Ohio State University  
Columbus OH 43210

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**From:** Johnston, Sarah  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 10, 2017 10:09 AM  
**To:** van Bladel, Kevin T.; Otter, Christopher  
**Subject:** Ishtar to Christ Assessment Plan

Hi Kevin and Chris,

Over the break, I completed the assessment plan for the proposed course From Ishtar to Christ, which I wrote to you about last semester. I attach the assessment plan here. I also attach a new version of the syllabus (writing the assessment plan led me to make minor changes there).

Do you have any idea when your committees might meet to weigh in on concurrence? I'd like to send this forward early this semester if possible.

Thanks a lot,  
Sarah

Sarah Iles Johnston  
Arts & Humanities Distinguished Professor of Religion  
Professor of Classics and Comparative Studies, and  
Professor of History, by courtesy  
The Ohio State University



## RE: Ishtar to Christ Assessment Plan

van Bladel, Kevin T.

To: Johnston, Sarah; Otter, Christopher

Tuesday, January 10, 2017 10:50 AM

- You replied on 1/10/2017 10:54 AM.

Hi, Sarah,

Sorry to have had a delay about this. The response from the committee had seemed ambiguous but I'm told that it's not. This means that NELC gives concurrence.

Would you be interested in cross-listing it with NELC?

Kevin

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**From:** Johnston, Sarah  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 10, 2017 10:09 AM  
**To:** van Bladel, Kevin T.; Otter, Christopher  
**Subject:** Ishtar to Christ Assessment Plan

Hi Kevin and Chris,

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Thanks a lot,  
Sarah

Sarah Iles Johnston  
Arts & Humanities Distinguished Professor of Religion  
Professor of Classics and Comparative Studies, and  
Professor of History, by courtesy  
The Ohio State University

President, American Society for the Study of Religion

Mailing address:  
414 University Hall  
230 N. Oval Mall