History of Gods

History/Religious Studies 396  Spring 2019  Thomas Wilson
Class hours: W 1:00-4:00  Office: KJ 140
Classroom: KJ 223  Office hours: T 10:30-11:30, W 1:00-2:00

Accommodation requests:
I will make reasonable accommodations on assignment deadlines for a student who requires them because of a documented disability as allowed by the Dean of Student’s office. If you need such accommodations, please discuss them with me no later than the end of the second week of classes so that we can make necessary arrangements for the semester.

Books for purchase:
Brent Nongbri, Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept (Yale, 2013)
Diane Rayor, The Homeric Hymns: A Translation, with Introduction and Notes (California, 2004)
A.K. Ramanujan, Speaking of Siva (Penguin, 1973)
Stephen Bokenkamp, Early Daoist Scriptures (California, 1997)

* available on Blackboard under Assignments
Δ articles accessed through online Databases on Hamilton library webpage
[* important background materials to be read before other assigned readings; understanding of these materials is essential, assumed, and not discussed in class]

Discussion board assignments: Check for discussion board assignments on Black Board for each class. Unless otherwise noted, these assignments are usually limited to about 75 words and are due by 9:00 AM THE MORNING OF CLASS. Briefly summarize the essential points of the readings listed.

I. The “Religion” Question 1/23
Brent Nongbri, Before Religion, 1-45

Jan. 25 12:00 Noon Friday 1st Writing Assignment Due: Summary of key points in the three readings for 1/23. Approx. 1000 words (+/- 50 words). Send as email attachment labeled lastname1.docx. Use correctly formatted footnotes.

II. Greece
A. Gods & Cults in the Ancient Greek City 1/30
The Homeric Hymns, 1-16
* Louise Zaidman & Pauline Pantel, Religion in the Ancient Greek City (Cambridge, 1992), 80-101; 112-132

**B. CASE STUDIES IN GREEK CULTS 2/6**

**APOLLO OF DELPHI**

“Hymn to Apollo,” *The Homeric Hymns*, 35-53


**ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES**

“Hymn to Demeter,” *The Homeric Hymns*, 17-34

* Zaidman & Pantel, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*, 132-140

**BRING TO CLASS** *(in addition to DB post): a synopsis of a rite that might have been conducted at Delphi or Eleusis based on The Homeric Hymns. Cite passages in the hymn to propose ritual action and to explain what the rite seeks to accomplish.*

**Feb. 8 12:00 NOON Friday 2nd WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE:** Write a plan for a rite conducted at Delphi or Eleusis based on The Homeric Hymns and secondary sources listed under part ii above. Identify the location, describe the ritual space, list necessary materials and ritual agents along with their functions, and explain the main aims of the rite. Approx. 1200 words. Send as email attachment labeled last name 2.docx.

**III. IMPERIAL ROMAN 2/13**


* Mary Beard et al., *Religions of Rome Vol. 2–A Sourcebook* (Cambridge, 1998), 78-165


**BRING TO CLASS** *(in addition to DB post): a synopsis of a rite conducted at a particular site in the imperial Roman pantheon. Cite passages from Beard, Religions of Rome (vol. 2: 78-165, 288-347) to outline key ritual actions, materials needed, participating human agents and their functions, and to explain what the rite seeks to accomplish.*

**IV. THEORIZING CULTS 2/20**

Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 85-131


* Talal Asad, “Toward a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual,” *Genealogies of Religion* (Johns Hopkins, 1993), 55-79


**V. INDIA**

**A. VEDIC RITES: AGNI 2/27**


“Altar of Fire,” Robert Gardner and Frits Staal (film, 58 mins.)

Discussion Board post: Select a few pages in the Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra, post a short synopsis that addresses the concrete aims of the cult actions described in your passages, such as what did the patrons derive from participation in the rite.

**B. BHAKTI DEVOTIONALISM 3/6**


**C. INDIAN RELIGION TODAY 3/13**

“Soing of the Goddess” (70 min.) Center for South Asia, University of Wisconsin, 1987
“Bearing the Heat: Mother Devotion in South India.” (45 min.) Center for South Asia, University of Wisconsin, 1995

**Mar. 15 Friday 3rd WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE** submit by 3:00 as email attachment (approx. 1500 words)
Describe and analyze ritual practices in the primary texts listed under part v. above as a means to accomplish specific goals. Send as email attachment labeled lastname3.docx.

**SPRING BREAK 3/20-3/27**

**VI. PREPARING FOR THE FINAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT 4/3**

discussion of goals and requirements of the final writing assignment (not due until May 10): approx. 3000 words

**VII. CHINA**

A. CELESTIAL MASTERS DAOISM (aka TAOISM) 4/10
Stephen Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (California, 1997), 1-29
“Commands and Admonitions for the Families of the Great Dao” (Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*), 149-185
“Scripture of the Inner Explanations of the Three Heavens” (Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*), 186-229

B. UPPER CLARITY and NUMINOUS TREASURE DAOISM 4/17
*The Upper Scripture of Purple Texts Inscribed by the Spirits* (Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*), 275-372
*The Wondrous Scripture of the Upper Chapters on Limitless Salvation* (Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*), 373-438
* Stephen Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China* (California, 2000), 189-225

**VIII. PERFORMING CULT 4/17**

group projects: students develop a Daoist liturgy, which describes the ritual space, lists necessary materials and ritual agents along with their functions, and explains the main aims of the rite.
IX. Confucianism and the Imperial Cults 5/1
“*The Autumnal Sacrifice to Confucius in Tainan*” (1999, film)
Randall Telfer, *Ritual Dance in the Sacrifice to Confucius*

X. Chinese Religions Today 5/8
“Han Xin’s Revenge: A Daoist Mystery” (video-recording, 90 mins.), Patrice Fava, director

**May 10 Friday Writing Assignment Due** submit by 3:00 as email attachment (approx. 12 pp. or 3000 words): Compare one or more Daoist scripture(s) in Bokenkamp’s *Early Daoist Scriptures* with at least one other non-Daoist ritual. Essays should from sources on ritual theory and may use outside sources. *Send as email attachment labeled* lastname4.docx.

Some useful websites:
Asian Historical Architecture <http://www.orientalarchitecture.com/>

Theoi Greek Mythology <http://www.theoi.com/>

Philip Clart, Bibliography of Western Language Publications on Chinese Popular Religions <http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~clartp/bibliography_CPR.html>

Final course grade determined on the basis of the following:

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**REVISION POLICY:** The first two writing assignments may be revised, which are due ten days after the graded assignment is returned to the student. The grades earned for original version will be averaged with that earned for the revision in calculating the final grade. Revisions must respond to comments and suggestions on the first version. The more significantly you develop the argument of the original version, either in conception or use of evidence, the more likely the revision grade will improve upon the original. Grades for revised versions that just correct mistakes noted in my comments on the original version are not eligible for change. *When submitting the revision, briefly and concretely describe in your email how your revised version addresses the instructor’s comments on the original.*

Grading criteria: A “good” (i.e., B) essay is clearly written and logically sound. An “excellent” (i.e., A) essay presents a compelling argument for a thoughtful and imaginative interpretation of the sources based on a thorough reading and re-reading of the sources and careful reflection upon the problems raised. A compelling argument meets three criteria: (1) a clear formulation of a problem, (2) analysis of the texts under scrutiny, and (3) a scrupulous use and citation of supporting evidence from the texts (i.e. “documentation,” see below). A thoughtful interpretation requires digging beneath the surface meaning of the texts to a subtler understanding of their connections to broader contexts. A “prose” grade of C– (i.e., less than “satisfactory”) is assigned to grammatically correct but informal and stylistically weak writing; and D+ or below for repeated infractions of basic rules of writing, depending upon frequency and egregiousness of such errors.

Nota bene: Present an argument based on your own interpretation of the sources. Document your claims. Develop your ideas fully. Your most important points should be clearly stated, explicated, and documented. When you quote a passage from the sources, provide enough information so that your reader does not need to consult the source for further clarification.

A thorough understanding of a text requires reading, reflection, and re-reading. A well written paper requires editing, self-critique, and re-writing.

Don’t simply summarize the content of your sources. Don’t assume that any major point you want to make is self-evident. In using evidence to support your argument, don’t assume that the facts speak for themselves.

Documentation: You must cite all sources of information used, even if you don’t quote a source directly. Cite relevant pages when you refer to specific passage in the text. Cite exact page numbers of any source from which you quote directly, although it is rarely necessary to cite the same source more than once in the same paragraph. Use proper citation forms (i.e., footnotes, end notes, in-text parenthetical notes) as described in the Hamilton College Style Sheet. Be consistent in the citation format used. If you do not cite the sources from which you derive information, or on which you base your description of an event, or interpretation of an idea, etc., the implication is that the idea is your own, or that it is based on your own primary research. Failure to cite such sources is plagiarism.