

The Study of Ancient Religions, Fall 2015 (10 ECTS-points)

Course content

This course, which begins the program, introduces the students to methods and theories in the study of ancient religion and to the development of Religion in the Roman Empire in its relation to society in the period during which Judaism, Christianity and Islam emerged. This is important because the Graeco-Roman culture of this period is in itself a constitutive element of European culture, society, identity and history. It is also essential since the knowledge and skills thus acquired by the student will constitute the foundations for subsequent discussions in other modules of the program.

Christianity arose in the context of a society where religion played an important part. Religion was both a concern of the state, a matter of private piety and the focal point for more independent associations and institutions. Being polytheistic, the ancient religious world was fundamentally pluralistic, though there also existed limits to what was acceptable in religion. Christianity was shaped by this religious world through a subtle dialectic whereby it both took over and continued essential aspects of this world and defined itself in contrast to 'paganism'. Judaism as well went through a decisive formative phase in the context of the Roman Empire. Islam took shape in a self-conscious relationship to the type of religion that had been developed by Jews and Christians in the ancient world.

To understand the emergence of the three monotheistic religions, it is therefore necessary to know something about the soil from which they grew – the religion and society of the ancient Mediterranean world under the Roman Empire.

The course covers the following topics concerning Roman religion:

- Religious institutions in the Mediterranean region under the Roman Empire
- The political and social uses of religion in antiquity
- Religious associations and their relationship to the state
- Freedom, compulsion and the extent of religious tolerance in antiquity
- Religious conflict in antiquity
- The policies of the Roman state towards Jews and Christians

The course will also give an introduction to different methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of ancient religions. The following topics will be emphasized:

- Definition and classification
- Comparing religions

- Polytheism and monotheism as theoretical concepts
- Myth, ideology and power
- Sacred space
- The meaning and function of sacrifice

Time period

The compact seminar is in Rome September 21 to October 3, 2015; a more detailed programme is included at the end of this document.

Exam: Paper to be submitted by October 16, 2015 (the question for the exam will be announced on October 9).

Responsible teachers and institution

Aarhus University

Anders-Christian Jacobsen

Birte Poulsen

Learning outcome

On completion of the course the student will have attained the following:

Knowledge:

Good familiarity with the nature, variety and functions of religion during the period of the Roman Empire.

A basic knowledge of theories that can illuminate our understanding of ancient religions.

Skills:

The ability to appreciate the transformation of religion caused by the monotheistic religions, as well as to recognise important structures and ideas that were taken over by these religions. The ability to do an in-depth study of a specific topic in the area covered by the course and to present this study in a written paper.

The ability to interpret ancient religions analytically, and to compare salient features with other religions.

General qualifications:

The ability to work independently in the area of ancient religion. The ability to communicate one's knowledge in written and oral form. The ability to think about culture and religion using general categories.

Prerequisites

The same as for admission to the program as such.

Course activities

This introductory module of the program will be taught at Rome, at the Norwegian Institute and at various archeological sites.

The teaching will combine:

- Compact seminar, including field-excursions.
- Tutorials.

Examination form

This module is examined through a fixed written exam in which the student is given seven days to write a paper of between eight and ten pages (19200-24000 characters including spaces and including references, but excluding bibliography) on a subject, question or material provided by the responsible teacher.

Required reading

Approximately 1300 pages of secondary scholarly literature and primary texts from antiquity read in translation; to be announced

Curriculum RRE 2014, fall: The Study of Ancient Religions

Books

Roman Religion:

- Beard, M., J. North and S. Price. *Religions of Rome, vol. 1: A History* (1998), p. 1-312. Cambridge University Press (ISBN 0521316820) (=312p).
- Beard, M., J. North and S. Price (1998). *Religions of Rome, vol. 2: A Sourcebook*. Cambridge University Press (ISBN 0521456460) (A selection of 150p).
- Rives, J. B. *Religion in the Roman Empire* (2007). Blackwell (ISBN 1405106565) (=210p).

Method & Theory:

- Johnston, S. I. ed. (2007), *Ancient Religions*, p. 3-152. Belknap Press, (ISBN 0674025482). Also available in S. I. Johnston (ed.) (2004), *Religions of the Ancient World*, p. 3-152. Belknap Press. (ISBN 0674015177). (=149p).

Available as e-book for Scandinavian students (bibliotek.dk, ask.bibsys.no, libris.kb.se).

- Lincoln, B. (2012), *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions*, p. 1-4, 17-30, 53-94, 109-130. University Of Chicago Press. (ISBN 0226481875). (= 114p)

- Morley, N. (2004), *Theories, Models and Concepts in Ancient History (Approaching the Ancient World)*. Routledge. (ISBN 0415248779). (= 134p)

Available as e-book for Scandinavian students (bibliotek.dk, ask.bibsys.no, libris.kb.se).

- Smith, J. Z. (2004), *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, p. 101-116, 145-159, 215-302, 323-339. University Of Chicago Press. (ISBN 0226763870). (= 93p).

Papers

- Assmann, J. (2005), "Axial 'Breakthroughs' and Semantic 'relocations' in Ancient Egypt and Israel", in J. P. Arnason et al., *Axial Civilizations And World History (Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture)*, p. 133-156. Brill. (ISBN 9004139559). (= 23p).

Available as e-book for Scandinavian students (bibliotek.dk, ask.bibsys.no, libris.kb.se).

- Bremmer, J. (2005), "Myth and Ritual in Ancient Greece: Observations on a Difficult Relationship" in R. von Haehling (ed.), *Griechische Mythologie und frühes Christentum*. WBG, 2005, (ISBN 353418528-5), p. 21-43. (= 22p)

Available online for subscribers to Academia.edu, at Jan Bremmer's personal account, and at <http://theol.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/2005/Myth/Bremmer-MythandRitual4.pdf>

- Detienne, M. (1989), "Culinary Practices and the spirit of sacrifice", in M. Detienne & J-P. Vernant, *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, p. 1-20, University of Chicago Press (ISBN 0226143511) (= 20p).

- Markschies, C. (2010), "The price of monotheism: some new observations on a current debate about late antiquity", in S. Mitchell, P. Van Nuffelen, *One God : Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, p. 100-111. Cambridge University Press. (ISBN 9780511730115)(= 11p).
Available as e-book for Scandinavian students (bibliotek.dk, ask.bibsys.no, libris.kb.se).
- Nuffelen, P. (2010), "Pagan monotheism as religious phenomenon", in S. Mitchell, P. Van Nuffelen, *One God : Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, p. 16-33. (ISBN 9780511730115) (= 18p).
Available as e-book for Scandinavian students (bibliotek.dk, ask.bibsys.no, libris.kb.se).
- Thomassen, E. (1999), "Is magic a subclass of ritual?" in D. R. Jordan, H. Montgomery and E. Thomassen (eds.), *The World of Ancient Magic: Papers From the First International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens 4-8 May 1997*. p. 55-66 (=11p).
- Vernant, J-P. (1989), "At Man's table: Hesiod's foundation myth of sacrifice", in M. Detienne & J-P. Vernant, *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, p. 21-86, University of Chicago Press (ISBN 0226143511) (= 65p).

RRE Rome programme 2015

Location of lectures and seminars: Accademia di Danimarca, Via Omero 18, 00197 Roma (auditorium)

- Mon 21 Sep Arrival
- Tue 22 Sep 900 Practical information
930–1200 Roman Religion Lecture I: deities, temples, myth and history.
1500 Visit to Forum Romanum and the Palatine.
- Wed 23 Sep 930–1200 Method and Theory Lecture I: myth, history & place.
1400–1700 Seminar I
- Thu 24 Sep 930–1200 Roman religion II: rituals and priesthoods.
1500–1730 Visit to the Capitoline Museums
- Fri 25 Sep 930–1200 Method and Theory Lecture II: rituals, ideology and power.
1400–1700 Seminar II
- Sat 26 Sep Excursion to Ostia.
- Sun 27 Sep Day free
- Mon 28 Sep 930–1200 Roman Religion Lecture III: Religions of the Roman Empire.
1500 Visit to the Arch of Constantine and S. Clemente.
- Tue 29 Sep 930–1200 Method and Theory Lecture III: polytheism & monotheism.
1400–1700 Seminar III
- Wed 30 Sep Day free
- Thu 1 Oct 930–1200 Visit to the Catacombs of Priscilla.
1500 Visit to the Ara Pacis, Campus Martius and the Pantheon.
- Fri 2 Oct 930-1230 Seminar IV: studying antiquity.
1500 Visit to Palazzo Massimo
- Sat 3 Oct 930-1200 Seminar V.
1200-1300 Election of two student representatives for the Programme Committee

Afternoon free

1930 Concluding dinner
- Sun 4 Oct Departure