

## REL 206: Greco-Roman Religions

Syracuse University, Spring 2015

Tues/Thurs 5:00-6:20, Crouse Hinds Hall 020

Instructor: Virginia Burrus (mvburrus@syr.edu)

Teaching Assistant: Duygu Yeni (dyeni@syr.edu)

Office hours: Professor Burrus, Tues 3:30-4:30 or by appointment, 520 HL

Ms. Yeni, Wed 10:30-12:30, or by appointment, 514 HL

This course explores the variety of religious practices and traditions that flourished in the richly pluralistic context of the Roman Mediterranean, from roughly the first through the fifth centuries of the Common Era—the period in which Christianity emerged on the scene. We will consider a range of religious expressions, including myths and stories, philosophy, ritual practice, and art, encountering a world that is truly different from our own and yet strangely familiar as well. *The goal of the course is to learn to think critically about religion, religious pluralism, and the encounter between polytheistic and monotheistic traditions, while also developing skills in historical analysis, textual interpretation, and writing.*

### READINGS

You are required to purchase four books for this course; these are available in the SU Bookstore:

- Luther Martin, *Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction* (NY: Oxford UP, 1987)
- Marvin Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts* (Philadelphia: U Penn Press, 1987)
- Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. Sarah Ruden (New Haven: Yale UP, 2011)
- Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Gregory Hays (NY: Modern Library, 2002)

Other required readings are available on-line or posted on Blackboard, as noted on the syllabus.

### REQUIREMENTS

**1. Faithful attendance and active participation in class discussions.** Attend class regularly and read all assignments carefully. Come to each class ready to offer a question or comment about an aspect of the readings that you found particularly intriguing; be sure also to bring the texts that we are discussing to class. Participation will count for 5% of the semester grade. You are allowed two absences without penalty (save them for when you really need them!); beyond that, barring truly exceptional circumstances, each absence will subtract one percentage point from your semester grade (separate from the participation grade).

2. **A series of ten one-page reflections** (roughly 300 words each), due on the dates marked in boldface on the syllabus. Prompts will be posted on Blackboard. Please use our contemporary authors to help in your reflections, but base your response on the ancient text(s). These reflection papers must be typed (double-spaced) and handed in at the beginning of class on the day they are due; *no late papers will be accepted*. There are thirteen opportunities for you to write reflection papers; you must choose ten of these; if you write more than ten, we will count the ten with the best grades. Reflection papers will count for 20% of the semester grade.

3. **Two four page essays** (roughly 1200 words each). Topic sheets will be handed out approximately two weeks in advance of the due-dates, and essay workshops will be held prior to the due-date of each essay. Each essay must be typed (double-spaced) and emailed as a Word doc file before midnight on the due-date (Feb.15, Mar. 29); hard-copies must also be provided (handed to the instructor in class or delivered to her office) by that deadline. *Late papers will not be accepted*. The essays will allow you to polish—and demonstrate--your interpretive, analytical, reflective, and writing skills. You should use only readings from the course. Each essay will count for 25% of the semester grade.

4. **One in-class, closed-book examination**, on Thursday, April 30, 5:15 – 7:15 p.m. The final exam will cover the material on Judaism and Christianity in Part III of the course. It will not be given early to anyone. The exam will count for 25% of the semester grade.

## ACADEMIC COURTESY

All students are expected to follow simple rules of academic courtesy to fellow students and instructors. This includes being prepared for class, attending class from beginning to end without leaving (barring urgent need), listening when another speaks, respecting personal and intellectual differences, and generally abstaining from any actions not productively related to this course; *electronic devices such as computers, tablets, and cell phones must be turned off and stowed away*. Anyone who fails to follow these guidelines may, at the discretion of the instructor, be asked to leave class for the day and will be counted absent.

## TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

### I. Introduction

T, 1/13      What is *Greco-Roman*?

Th, 1/15      What is Greco-Roman *religion*?  
--Martin, "Introduction"

## II. Apuleius's *Golden Ass*: A novelistic window onto the Greco-Roman religious landscape

- T, 1/20** Lucius as religious tourist  
 --*Golden Ass*, chs. 1-3  
 --Martin, ch. 1
- Th, 1/22 Discussion of chs. 1-3 continued  
 -- Magical texts 1.54, IV.1227-64, and IV.1716-1870 at  
<http://hermetic.com/pgm/>  
 --Optional: the Apuleius homepage is well worth a look—  
<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/apuleius> (lots of good material  
 on ancient magic)
- T, 1/27** Lucius's adventure as an ass: the Old Woman's Tale and the Great Mother  
 --*Golden Ass*, chs. 4-8
- Th, 1/29 Discussion of chs. 4-8 continued  
 --Meyer, 113-120, 125-130  
 --Martin, 58-62, 81-84
- T, 2/3** The salvation of Lucius by Isis  
 --*Golden Ass*, chs. 9-11  
 --Meyer, 157-159, 172-174  
 --Martin, 72-81

### *Essay topics posted on Blackboard*

- Th, 2/5 Discussion of chs. 9-11 continued
- T, 2/10 **Essay workshop**

## II. Greco-Roman piety

- Th, 2/12 Cultic practice—overview  
 --James Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007),  
 22-28 (B)
- [Sun, 2/15 **First essay due**]
- T, 2/17 Divination (1): oracles and dreams: Apollo and Asclepius  
 --Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 1.34, 9.39.5-14 (B)  
 --Aelius Aristides, *Sacred Orations* 2.30-36, 74-77 (B)  
 --Martin, 40-52

- Th, 2/19** Divination (2): a critic's view: Alexander of Abonoteichus  
 --Martin, 111-113  
 -- Lucian, *Alexander the Oracle Monger*  
<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl2/wl218.htm>
- T, 2/24 Philosophy (1): Stoicism  
 -- Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Books 1-6  
 --Martin, 36-40
- Th, 2/26** Discussion of Marcus Aurelius continued  
 -- Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Books 7-12
- T, 3/3** Philosophy (2): Platonism  
 --Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 1-3, 12-19, 53-57 (B)  
[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis\\_and\\_Osiris\\*/home.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis_and_Osiris*/home.html)
- Th, 3/5** The Mysteries (1): Eleusinian mysteries  
 --Martin, 62-72  
 --Meyer, 17-38
- 3/10, 3/12 SPRING BREAK
- T, 3/17** The Mysteries (2): Dionysus, Mithras  
 --Martin, 91-98, 113-118  
 --Meyer, 63-65, 93-99, 199-201
- Essay topics posted on Blackboard*
- Th, 3/19 **Essay Workshop**

### III. Judaism and Christianity

- T, 3/24 Hellenistic Judaism--overview  
 --*Wisdom of Sirach* 24  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=NRSV&search=Sirach%2024>  
 --*Wisdom of Solomon* 7:15-8:16  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Wisdom%207&version=NRSV>  
 --Martin, 102-111
- Th, 3/26** Judaism as myth, philosophy, and mystery  
 --Philo of Alexandria, *On the Contemplative Life* (B)

- [Sun, 3/29    **Second essay due]**
- T, 3/31        *Christian Judaism as myth, philosophy, and mystery*  
                   --Paul of Tarsus, *First Letter to the Corinthians*  
                   <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+1&version=NRSV>
- Th, 4/2**        A Christian philosopher  
                   --Justin Martyr, *Apology* (B)
- T, 4/7            A Christian novel  
                   --*Acts of Paul and Thecla* (B)
- Th, 4/9**        Imperial cult and Christian resistance  
                   --*Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (B)
- T, 4/14          From persecution to imperial patronage: Emperor Constantine
- Th, 4/16**        Desert saints  
                   --*Life of Antony*, selections (B)
- T, 4/21          Christ in art (1)  
                   --Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), ch. 3: "The Magician" (B)
- Th, 4/23**        Christ in art (2)  
                   --Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, ch. 5: "Christ Chameleon" (B)
- T, 4/28          Wrap-up
- Th, 4/30        **Final examination** (5:15-7:15)

#### ABSENCE DUE TO OBSERVANCE OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Syracuse University does not have non-instructional days for the observance of any religious holiday. However, we will provide an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirement that is missed because of an absence due to a religious observance, provided the instructor has been notified no later than the end of the second week of classes.

## DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), located at 804 University Avenue, Room 309; call 315-443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters. Students should submit a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, it is crucial to contact ODS and plan for accommodations as early as possible. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as university policy. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

In this course, the minimal penalty for any student found to cheat on an assignment is an F for that assignment; major violations will result in course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of Academic Integrity Policy; repeat offenses can result in even more serious sanctions.