
REL 620 Textual Scripts in the Study of Religion: Ritualizing Iconic and Performative Texts



Spring 2017

Mondays 3:45-6:30 p.m. in HL 504

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This course engages theories and descriptions of textual scripts that shape people's words, actions and experiences, both religious and secular, and that people manipulate for spiritual and social effects on religious performances, objects, cultures, traditions and themselves.

This iteration of the course focuses on the performative and iconic ritualization of texts. Performative texts serve as scripts for public reading, recitation, chant, and song, and may also script art and dramatic performances on stage, on screen or in the street. People ritualize iconic texts by carrying, displaying, waving, touching and kissing them, and by portraying their images in art and other visual media to evoke connotations of learning, knowledge, wisdom, and orthodoxy, and to represent specific religious traditions. The course examines the phenomenon of iconic and performative texts through the lens of ritual theory.

The first class introduces a selection of biblical and post-biblical texts that will serve as reference points in discussions of the secondary literature throughout the course. Students are invited to bring other examples of ritual and iconic texts from disparate cultures and traditions to bear on the discussions and, especially, on their final research projects.

Course Requirements:

Students are expected to discuss in class all the required readings (listed below after **Assignment**). In addition, each student will (1) write and later present a report about one additional primary text or set of texts or examples with which to think about iconic or performative texts (ca. 600-800 words due February 13th), and (2) write a substantive and original research paper (ca. 4000-5000 words) in a format suitable for publication in an academic journal on a subject related to the course topic, presenting the class with a preliminary summary during the last class meetings. The finished research papers are due on or before May 15th. The student's work will be evaluated on the basis of class participation (20%), the written and oral primary text report (15%), the research presentation (15%) and the final

research paper (50%). Late papers and reports will not be eligible for "A" grades.

Academic Integrity Policy:

Syracuse University's 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 about 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 verification 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. The presumptive penalty for a first offense by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of Academic Integrity Policy. The standard sanction for a first offense by a graduate student is suspension or expulsion. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Disability-Related Accommodations

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498, TDD: (315) 443-1371 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, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Religious Observances Policy

SU religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes and by the submission deadline for flexibly formatted classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through [MySlice/StudentServices/Enrollment/MyReligiousObservances](#).

Required Texts:

The required readings consist of some passages from the Bible (listed by biblical book), readings posted online in Blackboard, and the following books:

- William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge, 1987)
- Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge UP, 1999.
- James W. Watts, ed. *Iconic Books and Texts* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013) = *IB&T*

The assigned articles, except biblical texts and those marked by a minus (-), are available electronically

through Blackboard. The required textbooks are for sale in the Bookstore and also available on reserve in Bird Library. For further resources relevant to the topic of this course, consult the **Background** readings and the other articles in the collections cited below.

Topics and Readings (for full citations, see [bibliography](#) below):

Day	Topic	Texts:
Jan 23	Introductions: Scripts, Prescriptions, Scriptures	Assignment: Exodus 24-25, 31:18; Leviticus 1, 11, 19; Deuteronomy 13, 31; 2 Kings 22-23; Nehemiah 8. Watts, "The Three Dimensions of Scriptures" <i>IB&T</i>
Jan 30	Ritual Texts	Assignment: Leviticus 1 in Leviticus 1-5, 9-10 Goody, "Construction of a Ritual Text" Bell, "Ritualization of Texts" Watts, <i>Ritual and Rhetoric</i> , chapter 1
Feb 6	Ritualizing	Assignment: Exodus 24 in Exodus 19-24 Grimes, <i>Ritual Criticism</i> , selections. Smith, JZ. "Bare Facts of Ritual." Smith, JZ. <i>To Take Place</i> , 96-117. Rappaport, <i>Ritual and Religion</i> , chaps. 1, 2, 4, 5.
Feb 13	Writing as Performance	Assignment: Exodus 24 with Exodus 25 Tuladhar-Douglas, "Writing and the Rise of Mahayana" Moerman, "The Death of the Dharma" Austin, <i>How to do Things with Words</i> , selections Derrida, "Signature Event Context" Butler, <i>Excitable Speech</i> , selections Written primary text(s) reports due
Feb 20	Texts as Ritual Objects	Assignment: Leviticus 19 within Leviticus 17-20 Yoo, "Possession and Repetition" <i>IB&T</i> Suit, "Mushaf/Material Boundaries of the Qur'an" <i>IB&T</i> Myrvold, "Engaging with the Guru" <i>IB&T</i> Browse The Iconic Books Blog ; First oral primary text(s) report
Feb 27	Iconic Texts	Assignment: 2 Kings 22-23 within 2 Kings 21-25 Marty, "America's Iconic Book" Van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book" Parmenter, "The Iconic Book" <i>IB&T</i> Plate, "Looking at Words" <i>IB&T</i> Watts, "Iconic Books and Texts" Second oral primary text(s) report
Mar 6	Ritualizing Iconic Texts	Assignment: Nehemiah 8 within Ezra 1, 3, 7, 9-10 and Nehemiah 9 Van der Horst, " <i>Sortes</i> : Sacred Books ..." Sarefield, "Symbolics of Book Burning" Larson, "Gospels as Imperialized Sites of Memory" <i>IB&T</i> Waghorne, "Birthday Party for a Sacred Text" <i>IB&T</i> Third oral primary text(s) report

Mar 20	Transcendent Texts	<p>Assignment: Exodus 31:18 with Sira 24 (cf. Proverbs 8); Baruch 3:9-4:4; Acts 7:51-53; Genesis Rabbah 1 (first page); Qur'an, S. 3.7, 10.37, 13.39, 43.2-4</p> <p>Myrvold, "Making Scripture a Person"</p> <p>Rapp, "Holy Texts, Holy Men, Holy Scribes"</p> <p>Parmenter, "The Bible as Icon: Myths of Divine Origins"</p> <p>Kinnard, "On Buddhist 'Bibliolaters'"</p> <p>Kinnard, "It Is What It Is (Or Is It?)" <i>IB&T</i></p>
Mar 27	Canon and canonization	<p>Assignment: Deuteronomy 13 within Deuteronomy 4-6 Luke 1-2; 2 Timothy 3:14-17;</p> <p>Qur'an, S. 56.77-80, 6.7</p> <p>Al-Azmeh, "The Muslim Canon"</p> <p>Heyman, "Canon Law and the Canon of Scripture"</p> <p>JZ Smith, "Canons, Catalogs"</p> <p>JZ Smith, "Sacred Persistence"</p>
Apr 3	Performing Texts	<p>Due: Paper topics and texts</p> <p>Assignment: Nehemiah 8</p> <p>Qur'an, S.6.7, 17.78, 75.16-18</p> <p>Graham, <i>Beyond the Written Word</i> (all)</p>
Apr 10	Effects of Performing Texts	<p>Assignment: Deuteronomy 31 within Deuteronomy 30-34</p> <p>Miller, "Words with an Alien Voice"</p> <p>Malley, "Bible in British Folklore," <i>IB&T</i></p> <p>Yoo, "Public Scripture Reading Rituals"</p> <p>Pasulka, "Premodern Scriptures in Postmodern Times"</p>
Apr 17	Performing Ritual Texts	<p>Due: Paper thesis, bibliography and outline</p> <p>Assignment: Leviticus 1 with <i>Mishnah Berakhot</i> 1:1-4; 4:1-7</p> <p>Tambiah, "A Performative Approach to Ritual"</p> <p>Asad, "Toward a Genealogy of Ritual"</p> <p>Krause-Loner, "Be-Witching Scripture," <i>IB&T</i></p> <p>Humfress, "Judging by the Book"</p>
Apr 24	Performing Normative Scripts	<p>Assignment: Leviticus 11 with 1 Maccabees 1 and 2 Maccabees 7</p> <p>Mahmood, "Rehearsed Spontaneity"</p> <p>Wimbush, <i>White Men's Magic</i>, selections</p> <p>Arnold, "Indigenous Texts of Inhabiting Land" <i>IB&T</i></p> <p>Vissman, <i>Files, Law and Media Technology</i>, selections</p> <p>Watts, "Political & Legal Uses of Scripture"</p>
May 1	<i>Paper presentations</i>	Deuteronomy 31
May 15	Research Papers Due	

Course Bibliography:

(see also the [topically categorized bibliography](#) on iconic books)

Collections of essays (with abbreviations used in following list):

- *The Cambridge History of the Bible (CHB)*, 3 vols., eds P. R. Ackroyd, C. F. Evans, S. L. Greenslade and G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963, 1969, 1970) (available in Bird Library Reference section and in the stacks)
- *The New Cambridge History of the Bible (NCHB)*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 2013)
- *Canonization and Decanonization*, with An Annotated Bibliography by J. A. M. Snoek, eds. A. van der Kooij, K. van der Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1998)
- *The Death of Sacred Texts: Ritual Disposal and Renovation of Texts in World Religions*. Ed. Kristina Myrvold (London: Ashgate, 2010).
- *The Early Christian Book*. Ed. William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).
- *Iconic Books and Texts (IB&T)*, ed. J. W. Watts (Sheffield and Bristol: Equinox, 2013)
- *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. van der Toorn (Louvain: Peeters, 1997)
- *The Impact of Scripture on Early Christianity*, ed. J. den Boeft & M. L. van Poll-van de Lisdonk (Leiden: Brill, 1999)
- *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion*, ed. Becker et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011).
- *Text, Image and Otherness in Children's Bibles*, ed. C. Vander Stichelle and H. S. Pyper (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012)
- *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross-Cultural Perspectives in Biblicism*. Ed. James S. Bielo. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009)
- *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*. Ed. Vincent L. Wimbush. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008)
- *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. L.V. Rutgers et al (Leuven: Peeters, 1998)

Books and articles:

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- Arnold, Phillip. "Black Elk and Book Culture." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67 (1999) 85-111.
- Arnold, Philip P. "Indigenous 'Texts' of Inhabiting the Land: George Washington's Wampum Belt and the Canandaigua Treaty," *Postscripts* 6 (2010), 277-289 = *IB&T*, 361-372.
- Balbir, Nalini. "Is a Manuscript an Object or a Living Being? Jain Views on the Life and Use of Sacred Texts." In Myrvold, *Death of Sacred Texts* (2010), 107-24.
- Beal, Timothy. "Reception History and Beyond: Toward the Cultural History of Scriptures," *Biblical Interpretation* 19 (2011) 357-372.
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- Bell, Catherine. "Scriptures—Text and Then Some." In *Theorizing Scriptures*, 23-28.

- Borg, M.B. ter. "Canon and Social Control," in *Canonization and Decanonization* 411-423.
- Broo, Måns. "Rites of Burial and Immersion: Hindu Ritual Practices on Disposing of Sacred Texts in Vrindavan." In Myrvold, *Death of Sacred Texts* (2010), 91-106.
- Brown, Michelle P. "'Images to be Read and Words to be Seen: The Iconic Role of the Early Medieval Book,'" *Postscripts* 6 (2010), 39-66 = *IB&T*, 93-118.
- Camp, Claudia V. "Possessing the Iconic Book: Ben Sira as Case Study," *Postscripts* 6 (2010), 309-329 = *IB&T*, 389-406.
- Casson, Lionel. *Libraries in the Ancient World*. New Haven: Yale, 2001.
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- Chireau, Yvonne P. "Conjuring Scriptures and Engendering Healing Traditions." In *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*. Ed. V. L. Wimbush. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008. 119-27.
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- Denny, Frederick M. "Recitation of the Quran," *Islam and the Muslim Community* (San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1987), pp. 78-88.
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