

## REL 206: GRECO-ROMAN RELIGIONS

Spring 2009

Professor Patricia Miller

Office hours: Thurs., 3:30-5:00 (520 HL)

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This course introduces students to religious texts and traditions in a formative era of Western history and culture. Our focus will be on the variety of religious expression in Greco-Roman culture, which flourished in the geographical area of the Mediterranean basin during the first five centuries of the common era (a period of history variously designated as "late antiquity," or the "Greco-Roman era," or the "Hellenistic period"). By looking at such topics as debates about the nature of the gods and access to them (e.g., through oracles, magic, and ritual), the emergence of the idea of the holy person or "friend of God," and the clash of religious traditions as seen in art, we will develop an understanding of a rich religious imagination that is truly different from contemporary understandings of religion and yet strangely familiar as well. *The goal of the course is to develop skills in historical understanding and analysis of religious texts and traditions.*

### Texts

1. Luther Martin, *Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction*
2. Marvin Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts*
3. Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*
4. Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*
5. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

These are available for purchase in Follett's Orange Bookstore (in Marshall Square Mall). They are also on reserve (though in some cases in different translations) through Blackboard. Click on the first REL.206.M001.SPRING09.GRAECO-ROMAN REL entry and go to Course Reserves to get the call numbers. The books are on reserve in Bird Library.

Other Greco-Roman texts are available through web-sites, as noted within, and there will be occasional handouts. Please note: you can find this syllabus through the Religion Department homepage; the texts that are available on the web have been hot-linked for your convenience.

## Schedule of Readings

First Class: Jan. 13

Introduction: Jan. 15: Basic features of Greco-Roman religion

Reading: Martin, "Introduction"

### I. Religious Attitudes and Practices: Apuleius' *Golden Ass* as Paradigm

A. Lucius as "Graeco-Roman Everyman": Jan. **20-22**

Reading: *Golden Ass*, chs. 1-3

Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, Ch. 1

Handout for Jan. 24: magical texts

Optional: the Apuleius homepage is well worth a look—

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu:80/jod/apuleius>

(lots of good material on ancient magic!)

B. Lucius' adventures as an ass and the Great Mother: Jan. **27-29**

Reading: *Golden Ass*, chs. 4-8

Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, pp. 113-120, 125-130

Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, pp. 58-62, 83-84

C. The Salvation of Lucius by Isis: Feb. **3-5**

Reading: *Golden Ass*, chs. 9-11

Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, pp. 157-159, 172-176

Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 72-81

D. An Alternative to Isis: Eleusinian Mysteries: Feb. **10**

Reading: Martin, *Hellenistic Mysteries*, 62-72

Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, pp. 17-38

E. Essay Workshop: Feb. 12 (**required**)

**\*\*\*First Take-Home Essay Due, Feb. 19\*\*\***

## II. Hellenistic Piety

### A. Traditional Piety and Philosophy: Feb. 17-19

Reading: Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 35-40  
 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (half for each class)

### B. Divination and Dreaming

#### 1. Oracles: Feb. 24

Reading: Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 40-48, 111-113  
 Lucian, *Alexander the Oracle Monger*  
<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/w12/w1218.htm>

#### 2. Dreams: Feb. 26

Reading: Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 48-53  
*The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*  
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.html>

## III. Reformations

### A. Dionysus and Orpheus: Mar. 3

Reading: Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 90-102  
 Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 63-65, 93-99

### B. Judaism: Mar. 5

Reading: Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 102-111  
 Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 229-231

**\*\*\*Spring Break March 8 – 15\*\*\***

## IV. Innovations

### A. Mithraism: Mar. 17-19

Reading: Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 113-118  
 Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 199-201, 206-207, 211-221

### B. Essay Workshop: Mar. 24 (**required**)

**\*\*\*Second Take-Home Essay Due, March 31\*\*\***

C. Christianity: Mar. 26-Apr. 2

1. The Appeal of the Christ Myth: Mar. 26

Reading: Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 118-126  
*Acts of Paul and Thecla*

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/thecla/html>

2. The Phenomenon of the Holy Man: Mar. 31-Apr. 2

Reading: Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony*

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/vita-antony.html>

Handout on asceticism

V. The Clash of Gods in Art

Note: for this section of the course, reflection pages should present as succinctly as possible the main points and arguments of the chapters in Mathews.

A. The Chariot and the Donkey: Apr. 7-9

Reading: Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, chs.1-2

B. The Magician and the God-Man: Apr. 14-16

Reading: Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, chs. 3-4

(Note: Apr. 21 is Mayfest: no class)

C. Christ Chameleon: Apr. 23-28

Reading: Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, chs. 5-6

**\*\*\*Final Examination, Tuesday, May 5, 12:30-2:30 p.m.\*\*\***

**Please note this date; no one will be permitted to take the exam early, so make your travel plans accordingly.**

## Requirements

1. **Attendance is required and will be recorded.** Each student will be given three unexcused absences; thereafter, absences will count against you, and will result in the lowering of your final grade. Excused absences are defined as medical and family emergencies and must be documented. *Please arrive in class on time; lateness is disruptive for everyone. Also, once you are in class, please stay in your seat for the entire class session.*
2. **Active participation in class discussions.** In order to be successful in this course, you must read all assignments carefully so that you can ask questions and offer comments and reflections. Everything depends on this. Please bring the ancient texts that we are discussing to class.
3. **A series of one-page reflections, due on the dates highlighted in boldface on the syllabus.** Each one-page reflection is worth 5 points. Ask yourself the following question: what does a particular ancient text tell you about religious thought and practice in the Graeco-Roman world? (For example, do the Gods intervene in human affairs? How? Are they friendly or hostile? How many different kinds of spiritual beings are there? What do human beings do to interact with their divinities? What kinds of stories do they tell about them? What kinds of hopes and fears do humans have, and how does their religion respond to these?) Then write a response. Please use our contemporary authors to help in your reflections, but base your response on the ancient text. **Each response MUST reflect reading and engagement with both ancient and modern texts.** These responses must be typed (double-spaced) and handed in. We will often begin class with one or more students reading their reflection page. **There are twelve possible reflection pages; you must do ten. If you do not do ten, you will not get any credit for this assignment. 5 points each for a total of 50 points.** (If you do all twelve, I will count the 10 with the best grades.)
4. **Two Take-Home Essays.** The instructor will hand out topic sheets approximately two weeks in advance of the due-dates (**February 19 and March 31**). With the exception of the website pertaining to Apuleius (as noted on the syllabus), you must use only readings from the course. Do not use any other website (they are often unreliable). These essays will allow you to polish your analytical, reflective, and writing skills. **Essay Workshops** will be held prior to the due-date of each take-home essay. 50 points each. Total possible points: 100.
5. **A Final Examination, in class:** Tuesday, May 5, 12:30-2:30 p.m. 50 points. The final exam will cover readings not covered in the two take-home essays (that is, the material from March 26 until April 28). The final examination will not be given early to anyone.

Total possible points for the course: 200.

***PLEASE NOTE: We are not able to accept late work; it is bad for you and bad for us. Schedule your time carefully. Also, we do not accept work submitted by email. Any work submitted by email will receive an automatic zero.***

### 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 instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>. Students found to cheat will receive an F for that assignment. Students have a right to appeal.

### Disability Accommodations

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide 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, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>