

**COLLEGE OF THE HUMANITIES
RELIGION PROGRAM: RELI 4850B & 5850W**

Re-Constructing Religion: The Integration of Archaeology & Text in Studying Biblical Israel

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Office hours: 2a35 PA, Tu/Th 10:20am – 11:20am

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Lectures: Th 11:35am-2:25pm, Paterson 2a46

The study of ancient religions relies on information derived from textual and material remains. However, these records tend to be incomplete and fraught with interpretive difficulties. This course will examine various methodological and interpretive frameworks that have been used to write the religious history of ancient Israel based on the biblical text in combination with – and sometimes in opposition to – the findings of archaeology. Additional focus will be on the biases at work in a variety of theoretical approaches, including theological, feminist, literary, anthropological, and historical perspectives, and how to integrate them in a cross-disciplinary methodological strategy in the analysis and integration of evidence to reconstruct and understand ancient Israelite religious experience. Essentially, this is a course about critical thinking in the reconstruction of religious history. How do we know what we know?

Evaluation

4850 students:

1. 7 weekly reflection papers on the readings, approximately 3 pages in length, worth 10% each for a total of 70%
2. presentation of conclusions re integration of archaeology & text (each with a specific focus TBD), worth 10%
3. term paper expanding on the presentation topic, based on research and reflection, due April 10, worth 20%

5850 students:

1. 10 weekly reflection papers on the readings, approximately 3 pages in length, worth 5% each for a total of 50%
2. individual presentations (combining lecture and discussion leadership), worth 25%
3. term paper write-up of presentation research, due April 10, worth 25%

Schedule

Thur. Jan. 9

Introduction to the course

Defining terms: “history” and “religion”
Are all biases bad? Is scholarly objectivity possible?
Theory and method in archaeology, history, & religious studies

Thur. Jan. 16

Israel in its Ancient Near Eastern Context

Before class: watch 2 hr documentary at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/bibles-buried-secrets.html>

READ: “Syria-Canaan” and “Israel” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Near Eastern Religions* (on CULearn)

READ: Brandfon, “Archaeological Views: Digging a Hole and Telling a Tale” (on CULearn)

READ: Nadav Na’aman “The Trowel vs. the Text” (on CULearn)

Reflection paper: Assess and critically evaluate scholarly methods, goals, and assumptions at work in integrating archaeology and text to reconstruct ancient Israelite religious history in the NOVA documentary and scholarly articles.

Thur. Jan. 23

Methods in Reconstructing Israelite Religion

READ: Z. Zevit, “Surveying Paths: An Essay about Humanities, Religion, History, and Israelite Religions” (on CULearn)

Reflection paper: Summarize and assess Zevit’s approach to reconstructing Israelite religion.

Thur. Jan. 30 Genesis: The World of the Patriarchs and Its Authors

READ: Robert Miller, "Israelite Life before the Kings" (on CULearn)

READ: http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/mcnutt_ancientIsrael.shtml

READ: Genesis (all); Proverbs 31

Reflection paper: What does it mean to reconstruct biblical society with a "social science method"? Apply McNutt's method to your reading of Genesis – what conclusions might you draw about ancient Israelite society in reading the biblical text from a social science perspective?

Thur. Feb. 6 The Historicity of the Exodus

READ: Exodus (especially ch 1-20)

READ: B. Halpern, "The Exodus from Egypt: Myth or Reality?"

READ: B. Malamat, "Let My People Go and Go and Go and Go - Egyptian records support a centuries-long Exodus"

READ: R. Hendel, "The Exodus in Biblical Memory"

READ: B. Halpern, "Eyewitness Testimony"

Reflection paper: If we had only the archaeological evidence and no biblical story, would anyone postulate a historical exodus? If not, is the enterprise of trying to bring archaeology and text together to reconstruct a historical exodus, as some scholars do, fraught with methodological difficulty from the outset? Why or why not?

Thur. Feb. 13 The Emergence of Israel in Canaan

SKIM: Joshua, Judges

READ: "From Wilderness Wandering to the Promised Land" on CULearn

READ: Amnon Ben-Tor, "Who Destroyed Canaanite Hazor?" on CULearn

READ: William Dever, "The Search for History in the Bible" on CULearn

Reflection paper possibilities (please note that all of the above readings are required in order to do a thorough job on any of the questions below):

- 1. Do you agree with the "Wilderness Wandering" author's conclusions? What might you change, or add to them? Do you think anything more definitive can be said about the origins of Israel?*
- 2. Why is it important to understand the historicity of the exodus and Israel's origins in terms of reconstructing Israelite religion? How might perspectives on the historicity of the exodus affect one's reconstruction of Israelite religion from both text and artifact?*
- 3. Critically evaluate Dever's model for the emergence of Israel, and the methods by which he developed it.*

Thur. Feb. 20 BREAK WEEK

Thur. Feb. 27 The United Monarchy

READ: 2 Samuel (all)

READ: N. Na'aman, "The Interchange Between the Bible and Archaeology" (on CULearn)

READ: Y. Garfinkel, "The Birth and Death of Biblical Minimalism" (on CULearn)

READ: "Kings of Controversy" (on CULearn)

READ: "A Centrist" (on CULearn)

READ: "Dever vs. Finkelstein" (on CULearn)

READ: Philip Davies <http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/dav358019.shtml>

And for fun (**optional**, but if you read it check the comments @ bottom too) -

<http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/gar368025.shtml>

And B. Halpern "Erasing History" (on CULearn)

Reflection paper: What are the issues involved in the debates over the existence and potential dating of the united monarchy? What place does methodology have here? Whose methods seem the most sound to you, and why?

Thur. Mar. 6 Israelite Religion

Grad Presentation & Discussion Leadership: on distinguishing ethnicity in the archaeological record (extra readings for presenter TBD)

READ: Lev 1, 6-7, 10-20, 22, 25; Deut 1-7, 10-14, 17-18, 22, 26-32

READ: Ephraim Stern, "Pagan Yahwism" (on CULearn)

READ: Jeffrey Tigay, "What's in a Name?" (on CULearn)

READ: Uzi Avner, "Sacred Stones in the Desert" (on CULearn)

READ: William Dever, "A Temple Built for Two" (on CULearn)

LISTEN: "The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel" [The Bodies of God and the World of II.mp3](#)

Reflection Paper: What can archaeology tell us about the religion of ancient Israel? Does it correct an idealized (yet never realized) biblical picture, or add to our knowledge of real religion as it was practiced and described in the Bible?

Thur. Mar. 13 Official vs. Popular/Household Religion

Grad Presentation & Discussion Leadership: on categorizing ancient religion via archaeology (extra readings for presenter TBD)

READ: H. Shanks, "The Persisting Uncertainties of Kuntillet 'Ajrud" (on CULearn)

READ: H. Shanks, "Idol Pleasures" (on CULearn)

READ: H. Shanks, "Is the Bible Right After All? BAR interviews William Dever, Part II" (on CULearn)

READ: S. Ahituv, "Did God Have a Wife?" (on CULearn)

READ: J. G. Taylor, "Was Yahweh Worshiped as the Sun?" (on CULearn)

Reflection Paper (grad only): on presentation topic above

Thur. Mar. 20 Women and Religion

Grad Presentation & Discussion Leadership: on reading gender into the archaeological record (extra readings for presenter TBD)

READ: S. Ackerman, "Digging up Deborah: Recent Hebrew Bible Scholarship on Gender and the Contribution of Archaeology" (on CULearn)

READ: C. Meyers, "Engendering Syro-Palestinian Archaeology: Reasons and Resources" (on CULearn)

READ: A. Faust, "Pottery Talks: What Ceramics Tell Us About the Social World of Ancient Israel" (on CULearn)

READ: J. A. Hackett, "Can a Sexist Model Liberate Us?" (on CULearn)

Reflection Paper (grad only): on presentation topic above

Thur. Mar. 27 Goddesses & The Interpretation of Religion

Grad Presentation & Discussion Leadership: on interpreting "religious" artifacts (extra readings for presenter TBD)

READ: R. Hestrin, "Understanding Asherah – Exploring Semitic Iconography" (on CULearn)

READ: S. Ackerman, "Asherah, the West Semitic Goddess of Spinning and Weaving?" (on CULearn)

READ: Conkey & Tringham, "Archaeology and the Goddess: Exploring the Contours of Feminist Archaeology"

READ: S. Dolansky, "Re-Figuring Fertility Figurines: Fetishistic Functions of the Feminine Form"

Reflection Paper (grad only): on presentation topic above

Thur. Apr. 3 Conclusions: The Integration of Archaeology and Text

Undergraduate Presentations (10 min each): on methodology in the study of ancient religions – each student will select the topic covered during one of the previous weeks (excluding the last 4) and explore in more depth (extra readings TBD in consultation with prof), presenting the various arguments, perspectives, evidence, and methods of interpretation brought to bear on the subject, and some conclusions about the integration of archaeology and text in the topic s/he has explored.