School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology

Department of Religions and Theology

Religions in the Ancient Mediterranean (BCRE01)

ECTS: 5
Contact hours: 22 Lecture Hours
Lecturer(s): Dr Daniele Pevarello

Module Description:
What were the religious beliefs of the people we commonly call ‘pagans’? Did the Greeks and the Romans really believe in their gods and myths? Did the Phoenicians really practice human sacrifice? This module investigates the religious beliefs of the people who lived and prospered in the ancient world with particular emphasis on Egypt, Syria-Palestine, Greece and Rome. We shall look at literary sources and archaeological evidence such as works of art, ancient temples and inscriptions in order to understand the cults, religious institutions and the cultural context of the ancient Mediterranean religions. In particular, the module will focus on Mediterranean mythologies, theory and practice of sacrifice and prayer in ancient religion and the role of priesthood in ancient societies.

Learning Outcomes:
On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate the ability to identify the main methodological issues and problems inherent in the study of ancient religions. Students should be able to show competence in handling primary sources and in identifying the principal issues and trends of the historiographical debate on ancient religions.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the main mythological and religious ideas of the ancient world, showing an informed understanding of the relationship between religious beliefs, the structures of ancient Mediterranean societies and the main historical and cultural events which contributed to their development. Students should be able to demonstrate a satisfactory knowledge of the variety of sources (literary, documentary and archaeological) available for the study of ancient religions.
- Read ancient religious texts in English translation with competence and awareness of their religious and practical implications and premises. Students should have improved their skills in the interpretation and presentation of the evidence beyond the simplifications found sometimes in modern views of ancient pagan religions. This includes an increased facility in expounding scholarly views about ancient religions to both specialists and non-specialists, to write well-structured essays and to use and compile well-reasoned bibliographies.
- Demonstrate a solid understanding of the importance of the knowledge of ancient religions for further study and independent thinking on the
theory of religion.

**Indicative Reading:**

**Methods of Assessment and Student Workload:**
Annual examination (60%) and 1500 word essay (40%).