

BCRE01 Religions in the Ancient Mediterranean

Semester: A

ECTS Credits: 5

Duration: 11 weeks

Contact Hours: 22 (Lectures and conference)

Quota: None

Prerequisite subjects: None

Module Description:

Why did the ancient Egyptians build the pyramids and mummify the dead? Did the Phoenicians practise human sacrifice, as some ancient sources say? Did the Greeks and the Romans believe in their myths? This module investigates the religious beliefs of the people who lived and prospered in the ancient Mediterranean world with particular emphasis on Egypt, Syria-Palestine, Carthage, Greece and Rome. We shall study literary sources, inscriptions and archaeological evidence in order to understand the religious institutions, rituals and burial customs of some of the most significant civilisations of the ancient Mediterranean in their socio-cultural contexts. The module will focus on Mediterranean myths and mythologies, with special emphasis on dying and resurrecting Mediterranean deities, the theory and practice of sacrifice and prayer in the ancient world, and the difference between public and private religious devotion in ancient societies.

Methods of Assessment:

Single Hon. and TSM students: annual examination (60%) and 1500 word essay (40%).

Visiting Students (including Broad Curriculum): two 1500 word essays (50% each)

Broad curriculum (non-Visiting) students: one 3000 word essay (100%), no examination.

Learning Outcomes:

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

Identify the main methods of investigation and the core methodological issues and problems in the study of ancient religions. Students should be able to demonstrate familiarity with relevant primary sources (literary, documentary and archaeological) and to assess the principal questions and trends of the historiographical debates on ancient Mediterranean cults.

Demonstrate knowledge of the most important myths and religious ideas of the ancient Mediterranean world, showing an informed understanding of the structures of ancient Mediterranean societies and main historical and cultural factors which contributed to their development.

Read ancient religious texts in English translation with competence and awareness of their religious and practical implications and premises. Students will have improved their ability to interpret and assess the evidence beyond the simplifications found sometimes in modern views of ancient 'paganism'. 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.

Understand the importance of the study of ancient religions for further research and independent thinking on the theory of religion.

Indicative Reading:

Beard M., North P. and Price S. (ed.), *Religions of Rome* (2 vol.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).