BCRE01 Religions in the Ancient Mediterranean

Semester: A  
ECTS: 5  
Duration: 11 weeks  
Contact hours: 22  
Quota: Maximum of 10  
Prerequisite subjects: None

Module Description:

Employing literary sources as well as inscriptions, funerary art and ancient iconography, and other archaeological finds, this module investigates the religious beliefs and practice of the various peoples and civilisations of the ancient Mediterranean from ancient Egypt to Imperial Rome, focusing on the study of ancient rituals (e.g. burial customs, animal and human sacrifice) and on Mediterranean myths and mythologies (e.g. dying-and-rising deities in Egypt, Syria and ancient Greece). Students will reflect about the methodological challenges of studying ancient religions, focusing on the problem of interpreting fragmentary evidence, understanding ancient definitions of religion and magic, and distinguishing between private and public devotion in ancient societies. The course will help student to think about such questions as did people in antiquity believe in their myths? Why did the Egyptians mummify their dead? What is the significance of the ancient myths of Osiris, Gilgamesh and Baal? Did the ancient Phoenicians and Carthaginians practice human sacrifice?

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

1. Identify the main models of investigation and the methodological challenges in the study of ancient religions.
2. Recall the most important myths and religious beliefs of the ancient Mediterranean world, displaying an informed understanding of the structures of ancient Mediterranean societies and the main historical and cultural factors which contributed to their development.
3. Interpret material evidence (inscriptions and other archaeological finds) as well as ancient texts in English translation concerning the study of ancient Mediterranean religions.
4. Write well-structured essay and compile informed bibliographies, identifying the principal questions and recent trends in the historiographical debate about ancient Mediterranean cults.
5. Illustrate to specialists and non-specialists alike the main interpretative models and most recent discoveries concerning the study of ancient Mediterranean religions.

6. Formulate an independent and personal understanding of ancient Mediterranean religions as a foundation for further studies in religion and theology.

Indicative Reading:


Assessment: One 3,000 word essay

Name of Lecturer(s):

Professor Daniele Pevarello