

BC

Ancient Empires in the Near Eastern and Mediterranean Worlds (Semester A)

Lecturer: Prof. Anne Fitzpatrick (Dept. of Near and Middle Eastern Studies)

Contact hours: 22 lectures

ECTS: 5

Rationale and Aims:

This module aims to explore the ancient empires which emerged between the ninth to first centuries BCE, viz. the neo-Assyrian, neo-Babylonian, Persian, Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires which came in the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great. Modern scholarship has tended to compare the methods by which these empires ruled with those of more recent empires, the British empire, for example. The question of the appropriateness and usefulness of this comparison is explored through an examination of the ideological texts of these ancient empires (including palace art) and the documents which reflect the daily workings of these empires (letters, economic documents, legal texts and treaties). The second major question raised in the module is the extent to which the various subjects of empire (in particular kingdoms such as Israel, Judah, Moab, Edom and some of the Phoenician cities) were affected by empire. For example, what impact did these ancient empires have on the economies of these states? Can we trace any cultural impact of these empires, to be seen in changes to religious traditions and customs for example?

Module Content

Without assuming any prior knowledge on the part of the student, the module begins with an overview of the history of the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds between the ninth and first centuries BCE. Particular attention is paid to the Assyrian expansion, the methods used to achieve it and the ideological statements produced to justify it. Did the neo-Assyrians set out to Assyrianise everywhere they conquered, as some have claimed? In this regard, did they contrast sharply with the Persian Empire which is regarded by many as promoting the cultures of the regions it conquered? Finally, the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires are explored with particular focus on the question of “Hellenisation” of subject people and in particular the Jews.

Indicative Resources:

A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, 3000-330 BC* London:Routledge 1995.

A. Fitzpatrick-McKinley, *Empire, Power and Indigenous Elites*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015.

A. Fitzpatrick-McKinley, (ed) *Assessing Biblical and Classical Sources for the Persian Period*. Harrassowitz, 2015.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Outline the historical period from the neo-Assyrian expansion to the Ptolemaic periods
- Discuss the empire’s ideological statements of power, particularly in relation to the neo-Assyrian empire
- Critically assess primary and secondary sources relating to the neo-Assyrian empire
- Examine the role which the intellectuals of various subjected states played in assessing the impact of Assyrian domination
- Compare the prophetic response in the ancient kingdom of Judah with the response of scribes and priests in various Babylonian settlements
- Discuss the view that the Persian Empire marked a radical departure from the oppressive policies of the neo-Assyrian rulers

- Explain the Judean and Israelite “intellectual” response to the cultural encounter with Assyria and Persia
- Discuss the conquests of Alexander and his successors
- Assess the various scholarly evaluations of the impact of Hellenism on Jewish culture

Methods of Teaching and Student Learning

This module is presented through lectures which introduce a subject and invite student participation throughout. Seminars enable students to work through texts in small groups and to present their views and questions to the class.

Methods of Assessment

This module is assessed by essays and in-class tests. During the semester, students are invited to participate in an informal discussion of the issues and topics addressed thus far in the module.