Sacred Texts of the Middle East
THEO 3711 PW1

https://tinyurl.com/theo3711PW12019syllabus

Fordham University, Summer Session III, 2019
Instructor: Emanuel Fiano, Ph.D.

Asynchronous course

Remote office hours
Mondays 10:30 am-12 pm
https://tinyurl.com/fianoofficehours

Email
Emanuel Fiano: efiano@fordham.edu
Synopsis

Through an exploration of a multiplicity of perspectives about the divine, this course will introduce students to texts representative of various ancient, late ancient, and medieval middle-eastern religious cultures: Babylonian, Israelite, Jewish, Christian, Neopythagorean, Gnostic, Manichean, and Islamic. By analyzing the question of the divine from a multiplicity of angles, we will be exploring such problems as the relationship between violence and the sacred; unity and multiplicity within the godhead; prophecy and revelation; sin and redemption. Throughout this exploration, we will ask ourselves how the category of the divine is constructed; what makes a text “sacred;” and how religious communities understood themselves in relation to other groups. The reading of some works by contemporary authors will help students enter into a dialogue with those ancient texts and ideas. While the main approach of the course will be historical and theological, other domains such as anthropology, literature, art history, and philosophy will also receive attention.

Objectives

Over the course of the semester, students will:

- become familiar with some of the religious traditions of the ancient, late ancient, and medieval Middle East
- learn to analyze, explain, and historically contextualize primary sources
- acquire the tools to critically examine, both orally and in writing, diverging historiographic and theoretical perspectives in the study of religion
- develop their ability to reflect on theological and philosophical questions raised by ancient literary artifacts
Requirements

Class participation

Since this course is online, online attendance is required for students to gain the maximum of benefit from this course. It is expected that all students will be active online a minimum of three extended (over 10 minute) periods each calendar week, to complete assignments (including reading, viewing, and listening for which a reaction is not requested) as well as to participate in online asynchronous discussions (the nine “Discussion board questions”). There is no check-in system for this, as Blackboard records students’ activity at all times, and makes it visible to the instructor. Students are encouraged to interact with their fellow classmates, either electronically or in person, depending upon their interests and time availabilities. The participation grade will be based on students’ participation in discussion boards.

Individual meetings

In the middle of the Summer Session III, on 7/1, I ask you to schedule a 10-minute appointment with me in order to check in about your status in the class, and for you to provide me with feedback about the course. Please go to https://tinyurl.com/fianomeetingssummer2019.

Student-instructor interaction

Remote interaction between the students and the instructor is encouraged.

The instructor will make himself available for remote video, audio, and chat interaction on Webex for a weekly hour block (on Mondays from 10:30 am to 12 pm EST). Instructions for access to Webex for both students, faculty, and employees of Fordham University can be found here (and at http://tinyurl.com/fordhamwebex). The first time around, it might take you a couple of minutes to download the WebEx add-on, so I suggest to get on it some fifteen minutes before the appointed time. You can join the office hours at https://tinyurl.com/fianoofficehours; you should not need a meeting number, but were you to need it in order to obtain support from Fordham IT (718-817-3999 or HelpIT@fordham.edu), our meeting number is 643904072. You should be able to enter the meeting whether you are or are not logged in with your university credentials, by simply using your name and email address.

Moreover, students can expect to have their emails answered within 48 hours. Students’ emails will typically not be answered—nor will the instructor’s emails be expected to be answered by students—on weekends (between 5 pm on Friday and 8 am on Monday).

Students are expected to check their email at least once every 24 hours on weekdays to check for any announcements that may be sent out. Students are encouraged to contact each other by using the Fordham email addresses that are made available on Blackboard, and to ask each other for help and clarifications.
In addition, the instructor will intervene in discussion board threads when appropriate. The instructor may occasionally initiate email communication with students who appear in need of pedagogical support.

**Assignments**

**Discussion board questions**
The discussion board questions can be engaged with at any point during the duration of the relative unit.

**Reading responses and Voicethread recordings**
Reading responses and Voicethread recordings are to be submitted on Blackboard, under the appropriate assignment link within the unit, at any time before the due date.

**Midterm and final examinations**
Both exams will consist of multiple choice answers exclusively.

**Final paper**
The eight-page final research paper will be written on a topic that is of interest to the students concerning Manichaeism.

One week-long unit will replace two regular units and ask you to utilize your coursework time by preparing a 400-to-750-word research proposal for your final research paper on Manichaeism. The instructor will double the time of his video and chat availability during this week, and emails can be expected to be answered within 24 hours.

You can avail yourself of [this](#) and [this](#) resources to guide you about how to conceive of, pursue, and write your research project. Also, please consult [this](#) Religion and Theology research Guide put together by Librarians at Fordham University.

In looking for resources to support your research on a topic related to Manichaeism, typing "Manichaeism" in the keyword field of the Fordham Libraries website's advanced search feature will be the gateway to a universe of knowledge (much of which can be accessed online). Also, do not underestimate the potentialities of search engines such as Google. You will want to use sources of academic nature (mostly books published by academic or highly reputable publishers, and articles published on academic journals). An online tool called [Année Philologique](#), and available under the databases section of the Fordham Libraries, could also be very useful to you. There you can search any combination of words, and searches for particular topics and "Mani" or "Manichaeism" (in a variety of languages if you master more languages than English, but of course not necessarily) will yield interesting bibliographic results. Those resources can then be consulted either in paper or, on occasion, online, again through Fordham Libraries.
Finally, please notice that Fordham Librarians are available to provide help with your research. You can contact them in a variety of ways (including chat, text, or phone) by going to the Fordham Libraries website, and of course in person.

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**Policies**

**Academic integrity**

The assignments that students submit in this class must be their own work prepared exclusively for this course. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with and observe Fordham University's Undergraduate Arts and Sciences Policy on Academic Integrity in the University Regulations section of the Student Handbook. Any and all cases of suspected plagiarism or cheating will be referred forthwith to the appropriate university officials.

**Disabilities**

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Rose Hill - O'Hare Hall, Lower Level, x0655).

**Fordham resources**

All students are very strongly encouraged to schedule an appointment with the Writing Center (http://www.fordham.edu/info/20126/writing_center) in order to receive help with their writing, or to visit the Center for a walk-in. The Rose Hill Center is located in Walsh Library, Reference Area, Room 121 (phone number 718-817-0077); the Lincoln Center one in Quinn Library, Room 233 (phone number 646-868-4009).
Grades

Grade components

Four 300-word Reading responses 12% (3% each)
Three Voicethread recordings 9% (3% each)
Midterm exam 15%
Final exam (non-cumulative) 15 %
Final research paper 24%
Online participation 25%

Writing grading rubric for final paper

Content (originality, interest, engagement with the sources, methodology) 30%
Argument (clarity, logical flow, cogency, structure) 30%
Writing (formatting, orthography, grammar, syntax, logic, clarity) 30%
Overall academic excellence 10%

Writing grading key

WC= WORD CHOICE: the phrase you used does not express the idea you are trying to convey
R= REPETITION: you are repeating something you already expressed
I= INTERPRETATION: your interpretation or reasoning is problematic
F= FACT: a statement you made is factually incorrect
L= LOGIC: there is a problem of logic here (possibly including one of logical flow)
E= EXPRESSION: the writing (grammar, syntax, orthography, punctuation) is problematic
S= SOURCES: sources for a statement are lacking

Grading schema

This is the points-to-letter-grade correspondence table for the class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97-100pts</td>
<td>A+</td>
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<tr>
<td>94-96pts</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-93pts</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>87-89pts</td>
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<td>84-86pts</td>
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<td>0-59pts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Please notice that by 7/13 you will be expected to have fully read the novel *The Gardens of Light* by A. Maalouf. I am providing you here, as well as below, with a suggested weekly schedule so that the assignment can be spaced out over seven weeks rather than crammed right before the due date for submission of the related assignment: W0: 1-29; W1: 30-61; W2: 62-103; W3: 104-143; W4: 144-184; W5: 187-215; W6: 215-242. Whether or not you decide to follow this suggested schedule, please remember that you are responsible for the completion of the reading.
Module 1 / Unit 1
5/28-5/30
What is a Sacred Text?

Read
- W. Cantwell Smith, What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach pp. 1-20
- J.L. Kugel, How to Read the Bible, pp. 1-14

Suggested reading of The Gardens of Light, pp. 1-29

5/30

Discussion board question n. 1
After reading the commentary article To Teach or not to Teach?, which discusses the teaching of religion in public schools, please answer the following questions: Should religion be taught as part of a higher education liberal arts curriculum? And why? And which kind of approaches should be used in teaching religion in higher education?

Reading response n. 1
Is the Bible “Scripture?” Please answer in 300 words, referencing both Cantwell Smith’s and Kugel’s readings.
Read
- The Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablets I, II, VII, IX, X, and XI
- Iraqi Museum Discovers Missing Lines From the Epic of Gilgamesh

View
- The World’s Oldest Myth - Gilgamesh

6/3

Discussion board question n. 2
What does Humbaba look like? After reading the newspaper article, briefly research online (with the help of Google Images) artistic representation of Humbaba and offer a summary of your research, providing links to relevant images.

6/3 10:30 am-12 pm
Remote office hours on Webex
Module 2/ Unit 3
6/4-6/6
A Rising God: Marduk in Babylonian Cosmogony

Read
- *Enûma Eliš* (The Epic of Creation), Tablets I-IV (only skim Tablets V-VII)
- Genesis 1-2 illustrated by R. Crumb

View
- *The Babylonian Creation Story*

View and read:
- Psalm 104 sung in ancient Hebrew + Hebrew lyrics

Suggested reading of *The Gardens of Light*, pp. 30-61

6/6

Voicethread n. 1
Compare and contrast the Enuma Elish with Genesis 1-2: How and by whom are human beings created in either story? What is the nature of the creator and the purpose of the creation? Please record your answer (at least 4 minutes) without using a script.

One-point extra credit Voicethread [in addition to the previous assignment]
Read *Philo of Alexandria, On the Creation of the World according to Moses*, Ch. 1-14 (= pp. 47-70). What are some of the problems that Philo is attempting to solve in the narrative of Genesis, and how does he solve them through his exegesis? Please record your answer (at least 4 minutes) without using a script.
Module 3/ Unit 4
6/7-6/10
Is God Evil? The Problem of Theodicy

Read
- *The Babylonian Theodicy*
- Job 1-3 and 38-42

View
- *The Book of Job*

6/10

Discussion board question n. 3
Which of the two speakers (the sufferer and the friend) does the author of the Babylonian Theodicy side with? Is the perspective of either of the speakers comparable with that of C.G. Jung?

6/10 10:30 am-12 pm
Remote office hours on Webex
Module 3/ Unit 5
6/11-6/13
Sacred Space: Solomon’s Discourse for the Dedication of the Temple

View
- Jerusalem: An Introduction to the City
- The Jerusalem of David and Solomon

Read
- 1 Kings 8:22-61
- Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20-65

Suggested reading of *The Gardens of Light*, pp. 62-103

6/13

Reading response n. 2
Does an attentive reading of 1 Kings 8:22-61 suggest that Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem was meant to function as a “sacred space” in the sense in which Eliade understands this notion? Why? Also, can you identify in the text any signs of a post-exilic composition, revealing a different approach to the question of exile than that of Psalm 137? Please answer in 300 words.
Read
- Gospel of Matthew 1:1-25
- Gospel of John 1:1-18
- P. Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*, 18-52

View
- *The First Christianity*

6/17

Discussion board question n. 4
You are an early believer in Jesus. After reading the diverging accounts of the Gospel of Matthew (1:1-25) and of the Gospel of John (1:1-18), you are confused about Jesus’ origins. What opinion would you form for yourself on the basis of these two readings only, and why?

6/17 10:30 am-12 pm
Remote office hours on Webex
Read
- Paul of Tarsus, *Letter to the Romans*
- P. Fredriksen, From Jesus to Christ, 52-61

View
- Daniel Boyarin on Mark 7 and the Laws of Kashrut
- *A Portrait of Jesus’ World*

Suggested reading of *The Gardens of Light*, pp. 104-143

6/20

Voicethread n. 2
Having read Paul’s *Letter to the Romans*, do you think there is any way in which, or any conditions under which, Paul might there be allowing for the possibility to preserve the observance of Torah precepts? Please record your answer (at least 4 minutes) without using a script.

6/20

Deadline to sign up for 7/1 remote ten-minute individual meetings here
Module 5 / Unit 8

6/21-6/24

Sacrifice to God: The Binding of Isaac in Jewish and Christian Interpretation

**Read**
- Genesis 22:1-19
- *Midrash Rabbah* (Jewish commentary) on Genesis 22
- Origen of Alexandria (Christian writer), Homilies on Genesis and Exodus, VIII

**View**
- *What is Eid al-Adha?*

**View and Read**
- *Et sha'arei ratzon* (traditional Jewish piyut)

**Optional viewing**
- *The Believer*

6/24

**Discussion board question n. 5**
Why do you think the story of the binding of Isaac grabs religious imagination? In which different ways, according to what you have read, did Jewish and Christian interpretations of this story diverge in late antiquity?

6/24 10:30 am-12 pm
Remote office hours on Webex
Read
- Leviticus 1-2
- G. Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice*, pp. 56-83

View
Interview with René Girard

Suggested reading of *The Gardens of Light*, pp. 144-184

Reading response n. 3
In light of the distinctions made in the beginning of the course about different methodological approaches to the study of religion, what do you think are some of the main divergences between the premises on which Girard and Stroumsa’s interpretations are built? Please answer in 300 words.
Midterm exam preparation

6/28-7/1

These days are left free for you to prepare for the midterm exam, which will be proctored remotely at 8-10 am on 7/3.

7/1 7:30 am- 5 pm

Remote ten-minute individual meetings with instructor for all students. Regular Webex office hours suspended.
Module 6 / Unit 10
7/2-7/4
Belonging to Up High: The Ancient “New Age”

Read
- Acts of Thomas, ‘The Hymn of the Pearl’
- Gospel of Philip

View
- The Matrix

Suggested reading of The Gardens of Light, pp. 187-215

Midterm exam
7/3 8-10 am

Midterm exam (multiple choice answers only), which will be made available on Blackboard, inside of “Module 5”, at 7:50 am. Your allotted time for taking the exam is two hours (very likely it is going to take you about one tenth of that). The exam is worth 15 points out of your final grade, and is composed of 10 multiple-choice questions with three options, only one of which is correct. The information you are being tested on is drawn primarily from the readings, but also from some of the audiovisual assignments.

7/4

Discussion board question n. 6
To which kind of social classes or types of human beings do you think a message such as Gnosticism’s would have appealed, and why?
Betraying God: The Gospel of Judas

View
- National Geographic documentary on the Gospel of Judas

Read
- Gospel of Judas
- Three Versions of Judas
- Letter to the Editor, What the Gospel of Judas Really Says

Voicethread n. 3
According to your own reading of the Gospel of Judas, is Judas a hero or a villain? Please record your answer (at least 4 minutes) without using a script.

7/8 10:30 am-12 pm
Remote office hours on Webex
Module 7 / Unit 12
7/9-7/11
Battle in Heaven: The Manichaean Myth

Read

- *Acts of Archelaus*, selection
- *A Psalm by Herakleides*
- *Kephalaion* n. 8: “Concerning the Fourteen Vehicles that Jesus has boarded”
- F.C. Burkitt, *The Religion of the Manichees*, 3-47

Suggested reading of *The Gardens of Light*, pp. 215-242

7/9

Last day to withdraw without incurring WF

7/11

Discussion board question n. 7
What strikes you in the primary texts of Manichaeism that you have read? In which was this religion similar to other ancient religions that you know? And in which way was it different?

7/11

Deadline for finishing *The Gardens of Light*
The present week-long unit replaces two regular units and asks you to utilize your coursework time by preparing an (ungraded) 400-to-750-word research proposal for your final eight-page research paper on Manichaeism. The instructor will double the time of his video and chat availability during this week, and emails can be expected to be answered within 24 hours. Proposals will be due by 7/18, and the instructor will provide feedback by 7/21.

This proposal is an ungraded assignment, and it is meant to be useful for you in receiving feedback about the topic you intend to write about for the paper; if the 750 words requirement is hindering rather than helping you, feel free to write something in the 400-500 word range instead.

Unlike for the final paper, you do not need a particular number or range of academic sources for the proposal; but if you want to indicate which sources you are going to consult, all the better. In that case, pick any already-existing citation style and stick to it (I don't have a preference for one). The proposal is not supposed to be the beginning of the paper, but a description of the theme you have chosen and a summary of the argument you will be making.

7/13 10:30 am-12 pm
Extra remote office hours on Webex

7/15 10:30 am-12 pm
Remote office hours on Webex

7/18
Uploads of 400-to-750-word research proposals due on Blackboard
Module 8 / Unit 14
7/19-7/22
The Prophet in the Qur’an and in the Hadith

Read
- Qur’an, transl. Abdel Haleem: Surahs Ibrahim (14), Al-Anbya (21) and Muhammad (47)
- Sahih al-Bukhari, selection
- C.W. Ernst, Following Muhammad. Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World, 73-92

View
- Muhammad and the Dawn of Islam

7/22
Read instructor feedback on your research proposal and being to work on your eight-page research paper.

7/22
Discussion board question n. 8
What is the difference between the way in which the figure of Muhammad appears in the Qur’an and in Sahih al-Bukhari’s collection of Hadith?

7/22 10:30am-12 pm
Remote office hours on Webex
The Pre-existence of the Prophet and Islamic Mysticism

Read

7/25

Discussion board question n. 9
Both Islamic doctrines about the pre-existence of the Prophet and the mysticism represented by Mansur al-Hallaj invite possible comparisons with the life of Jesus and with Christology. What are, in your opinion, some of the benefits and dangers of engaging in such comparisons?
Final exam preparation  
7/26-8/1

These days are left free for you to prepare for the final exam (also multiple choice), which will be proctored remotely at 8-10 am on 8/6.

7/29 10:30 am-12 pm

Remote office hours on Webex

8/1

Final paper due. Please submit this eight-page assignment on Blackboard in 12-point double-spaced Times New Roman font with one-inch margins in a Word format.

Final exam  
8/6 8-10 am

Final exam (multiple choice answers only, non-cumulative), which will be made available on Blackboard, inside of “Module 8”, at 7:50 am. Your allotted time for taking the exam is two hours (very likely it is going to take you about one tenth of that). The exam is worth 15 points out of your final grade, and is composed of 10 multiple-choice questions with three options, only one of which is correct. The information you are being tested on is drawn primarily from the readings, but also from some of the audiovisual assignments.