

**California State University, Sacramento**  
**Religions of the Roman Empire**  
**Spring 2009**

**HRS/LIBA 224-01**  
**Library 126**  
**Tuesday, 6:00-8:50**

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**Office: Mendocino 2028 278-7703**  
**Hours: TR 12:15-1:15, T 4:45-5:45, and by appt.**

This course is a graduate-level survey of the major religious beliefs and practices in the Greco-Roman world from 100BCE-400CE. Topics include traditional Greek and Roman religions, healing cults, philosophical religion (Hellenistic philosophies, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism), and the various mystery religions. The first two-thirds of the semester will consist primarily of a diachronic study punctuated with focused analyses of specific topics as presented in our assigned texts. The last several weeks will be devoted to focused analyses through student presentations of selected term paper topics (drawing from a wide array of sources beyond those assigned).

### **Texts**

Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome, Volume 1: A History, and Volume 2: A Sourcebook*  
Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.

### **Learning Objectives**

Students can expect to meet the following objectives:

- To become familiar with the all of the significant forms of Roman religion
- To develop expertise in the primary source material and secondary scholarship relating to the paper topic (of each student's choosing)
- To gain a deeper understanding of Roman values and their role in shaping various religious forms, and of various related aspects of Roman culture (art, literature, governance, et al.)
- To employ and practice the historical and phenomenological approaches to the study of religious subject matter, and to explore the challenges and implications of studying religion in an academic setting
- To improve critical thinking skills through careful reading and discussion of a wide variety of primary texts and of sophisticated scholarly analysis
- To enhance techniques of graduate-level research and writing in history and religious studies
- To enhance oral presentation skills, along with the pedagogical techniques necessary to present an effective report and to contribute to class discussion

### **Requirements**

In addition to the completion of all reading assignments (underlined in the Schedule and Assignments below) by the dates assigned, formal requirements and their correlative grade percentages consist of the following:

- Regular attendance and fruitful contribution to class discussions (25%)
- Five short (app. 2 pp.) essays in response to the assigned readings (25%)
- Oral presentation (app. 20 mins.) and written term paper (20-25 pp.) (50%)

(The grade assigned to the presentation/paper will represent an assessment of both aspects in the aggregate; a report [or paper] that is notably of better quality than the paper [or report] will help lift the overall grade.)

## Schedule and Assignments

### Week 1 (1/27)

(Introductions. Recommended reading: Ferguson, 5-147)

### Week 2 (2/3)

Ferguson, 148-172

#### RoR1 ch. 1, Early Rome

1. Finding the religion of the early Romans
2. The priests and religious authority
3. Gods and goddesses in the life of Rome
4. Religion and action
5. Adjusting to the new Republic
6. Innovation and change

#### RoR2 ch. 1, Earliest Rome

1. Before the gods?
2. King Numa's reforms
3. The archaic triad: Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus
4. Early rituals
5. Rome and the Latins
6. Religion and the Roman *gens*
7. Greeks and Greek influence in Rome
8. The arrival of the Sibylline Books (sixth century B.C.)
9. Etruscan Rome and the Capitoline triad

### Week 3 (2/10)

#### RoR1 ch. 2, Imperial triumph and religious change

1. The interpretation of change
2. The later third century B.C.: innovation and tradition
3. Reactions to change
4. Priests in politics
5. The religious situation of the mid-second century

#### RoR2 ch. 2, The deities of Rome

1. Gods in human form
2. Deities of different types
3. The deification of abstract ideas
4. Roman debate on the character of the gods
5. Interpretations of the goddess Vesta
6. The incorporation of new deities
7. Magna Mater (Cybele) and her cult

8. From human to divine: becoming a god
9. Rome and 'barbarian' deities
10. One god: pagans, Jews and Christians

#### Week 4 (2/17)

##### RoR1 ch. 3, Religion in the late Republic

1. Comparative history?
2. Disruption and neglect?
3. The politics of religion
4. Divus Julius: becoming a god?
5. Religious differentiation: scepticism, expertise and magic
6. Rome and the outside world

##### RoR2 ch. 3, The calendar

1. The Calendar and religious celebrations
2. The republican calendar: Antium (84-55 B.C.)
3. The calendar of Rome: the month of April
4. A calendar from Cumae (A.D. 4-14)
5. A military calendar from Dura Europus (A.D. 223-227)
6. The calendar of the martyrs of Rome (A.D. 354)
7. Calendar from Campania (A.D. 387)

#### Week 5 (2/24)

##### RoR1 ch. 4, The place of religion: Rome in the early Empire

1. Myths and place
2. The re-placing of Roman religion

##### RoR2 ch. 4, Religious places

1. The Roman temple-building
2. The temple of Mars Ultor (the Avenger) and the Forum of Augustus
3. Altars and the Augustan Ara Pacis (Altar of Peace) at Rome
4. The Roman *templum*
5. The grove of the Arval Brothers
6. The cult centres of Mithras
7. Religious space and the Roman Forum
8. The *pomerium*, the sacred boundary of the city
9. Sanctuaries of Latium: the temple complex of Fortuna Primigenia (Primordial Fortune) at Praeneste
10. The forum at Pompeii
11. The grove of Albunea and its oracle
12. Religion of the home: the household shrine
13. The house-tomb and its rituals
14. Jewish synagogues in the Roman Empire
15. The architecture of Christianity

Week 6 (3/3)

Ferguson, 173-199

RoR1 ch. 5, The boundaries of Roman religion

1. Defining the acceptable
2. Patrolling the unacceptable

RoR2 ch. 5, Festivals and ceremonies

1. The Parilia
2. The Lupercalia
3. The Saturnalia
4. The *Salii* and their rituals
5. Ritual conservatism and innovation
6. Ceremonies of Magna Mater and Isis
7. The games
8. The ceremony of triumph

RoR2 ch. 6, Sacrifices

1. The stages of sacrifice
2. A record of sacrifice
3. Private sacrifice
4. Sacrifice without animals
5. The season of the 'Sacred Spring' (*Ver Sacrum*)
6. Human sacrifice
7. The *taurobolium* in the rituals of Magna Mater
8. Conflict and opposition

Week 7 (3/10)

Ferguson, 213-243

RoR1 ch. 6, The religions of imperial Rome

1. The landscape of official cults at Rome
2. The visibility of religions
3. The appeal
4. The members
5. Homogeneity and exclusivity

RoR2 ch. 7, Divination and diviners

1. Some early prophets
2. Public auspices
3. Prodigies
4. The *haruspices*
5. Sibylline Oracles
6. Prophecy in the Roman empire
7. Magical divination
8. Astrology
9. Dreams

## RoR2 ch. 8, Priests and priestesses

1. The earliest Roman priesthoods
2. Priests and politics in the Roman Republic
3. The administrative business of the priestly colleges
4. The Vestal Virgins (*Virgines Vestales*)
5. The emperor as priest
6. Priests of the imperial cult
7. 'Oriental' priests at Rome: priests of Magna Mater
8. The caring priest of Isis
9. Priesthoods of the later Roman aristocracy
10. Pagan priesthood under attack

Week 8 (3/17)

Ferguson, 199-212, 243-251

## RoR1 ch. 7, Roman religion and Roman Empire

1. Roman religion outside Rome
2. Controls and integration
3. Imperial rituals

## RoR2 ch. 9, Individuals and gods: life and death

1. Late republican dynasts
2. Emperor worship
3. Funeral ceremonies
4. Gods and mortals
5. Sickness and trouble
6. Death

## RoR2 ch. 10, Rome outside Rome

1. The rules of Diana on the Aventine
2. Colonies of Rome
3. Republican relations with foreign powers
4. Roman religious authority outside Rome
5. Emperor-worship in the provinces
6. Outside reaction to the worship of the emperor

Week 9 (3/24)

**Due:** Statement of presentation/paper topic

## RoR1 ch. 8, Roman religion and Christian emperors: fourth and fifth centuries

1. Constantine and the church
2. Imperial religious policy
3. The growth of the Christian church
4. The traditional gods

## RoR2 ch. 11, Threats to the Roman order

1. Burning of the Books of Numa (181 B.C.)
2. The law on poisoning and magic
3. The fraudulent claims of the *magi*
4. Love magic
5. Curse tablets
6. Magic and revelation
7. Regulations about divination
8. The Jews
9. Regulation of clubs and associations
10. A trial for foreign *superstitio* (A.D. 57)
11. Responses to the Christians
12. Ruling against the Manichees (A.D. 297 or 302)
13. Constantine and the Church
14. Theodosius' ban on sacrifices (A.D. 392)

## RoR2 ch. 12, Religious groups

1. The cult of Bacchus
2. Regulations of a society of Diana and Antinous
3. Jupiter Dolichenus
4. Isis
5. The mysteries of Mithras
6. The Jews
7. The Christians

Week 10 (4/7)

Ferguson, 319-395, 612-613 (on Hellenistic philosophies, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism)

*Apocryphon of John* (handout)

## RoR2 ch. 13, Perspectives

1. Roman piety?
2. Roman philosophical critique
3. Cicero's ideal Roman religion
4. Satirizing women's religion
5. Philosophy and religion as a way of life
6. Religion and empire
7. A traditionalist description of Rome
8. Christianity as the real religion of Rome
9. The old and the new cities of god

Weeks 11-15 (4/14, 4/21, 4/28, 5/5, 5/12)

Student presentations

**Paper due:** Tuesday, May 19, 5:15 p.m.