

**Department of Religious Studies**  
**RELI 351-001: Religions of the Ancient Near East**

**ANCIENT EGYPTIAN RELIGION**

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Office Hours: TR 9.15-10.15 a.m. and 3.00-4.00 p.m. or by appointment  
Web-site: [www.gmu.edu/departments/religious\\_studies](http://www.gmu.edu/departments/religious_studies)

Spring 2008  
TR 1:30-2:45 p.m.  
Robinson A 245

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

After an introduction to the geography, topography, the society and history of Ancient Egypt, the course will focus on the religion of Ancient Egypt under the following topics:

- the world of the gods and the major divinities of Egypt
- creation and the cosmos and the relevant myths
- temples, their structure and functions
- pharaohs, the divine kings, and pyramids
- death and the afterlife
  - mummification, pyramids, tombs, funerary practices and beliefs
  - the Book of the Dead and myths of the afterlife, the cult of Osiris
  - a survey of hieroglyphs,
  - Akhenaten and the cult of the sun-disk
  - enduring Egypt, religious images and beliefs that survive

Books, lectures and some primary texts, will be supplemented by DVDs and videos, since Egyptian religion is highly visual. At the end of the course, students will have a good grounding in the beliefs, the cults, the myths and symbols of Ancient Egypt: they will be able to interpret common religious images such as the judgement of the dead or the celestial navigation of the sun-god, to understand the nature and function of pyramids and temples and to have some knowledge of the writing system.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Robert A. Armour, Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt (The American University in Cairo Press, 2001 2nd. Edition)

Douglas Brewer and Emily Teeter, Egypt and the Egyptians (Cambridge 2007)

Rosalie David, Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt (Penguin 2003)

W. D. Davies, Egyptian Hieroglyphs (U of CA/British Museum 8<sup>th</sup> Impression, 2001)

Bill Manley, Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Egypt (Penguin, 1996)  
the "bible" for the course that should be read and re-read and brought to class as its charts etc. are very helpful

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS (Books marked \* are highly recommended)

The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt and the Encyclopedia of Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations are both in the reference section of Fenwick Library.\*

I. Shaw and P. Nicholson, The Dictionary of Ancient Egypt (British Museum, 1995)  
[this has short entries on *everything* and very useful bibliographies at the end of each article]

T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt

M. Lurker, The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt

E. Hornung, Ideas and Image: Essays on Ancient Egyptian Thought  
The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife

S. Morenz, Egyptian Religion

W. J. Murnane, The Penguin Guide to Ancient Egypt (2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1996)\*

B. E. Shaffer, Temples of Ancient Egypt\*

I. Shaw, Exploring Ancient Egypt\*

A. Siliotti, A Guide to the Pyramids of Egypt\*  
A Guide to the Valley of the Kings

J. H. Taylor, Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt\*

B. Watterson, Gods of Ancient Egypt\*

R. H. Wilkinson, Reading Egyptian Art

The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt\*

[a tiny sampling from a list that could go on and on, or *djet en neheh*, “for ever and enduringly,” as the Egyptians would have said]

There is an enormous amount of material on Ancient Egypt, books, videos, web-sites: the texts above are clear, focused, academic texts. However, the lavishly illustrated “coffee-table” books on all aspects of Ancient Egyptian life, published by museums, art galleries etc., should be consulted - they are simply too heavy to carry! Public libraries often have these kind of books in their holdings. You will have no problem finding material for research and papers, the difficulty will be refining and controlling it. Internet sources should be chosen with care and referenced. **Do NOT EVER** use books by E. A. Wallis Budge - they are still in print, many from the late nineteenth century, but are very dated. However, the works of famous scholars such as Flinders Petrie, Alan Gardiner, Pierre Montet and J. Rendell Harris are still classics of scholarship. Websites proliferate, but use them carefully, selecting ones that are academic, not “Tour Egypt” websites.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Readings: as assigned

### Essays and Examinations

There will be a test - 15% - **Tuesday February 26<sup>th</sup>**

a research paper - 30% - **due in class Thursday March 20<sup>th</sup>**

[Note that this paper will incorporate a TAC requirement]

a term paper - 35% - **due in class Thursday April 24<sup>th</sup>**

a final examination - 20% - **Thursday May 8<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m.**

Students must take exams and present papers on the assigned days and at the given times. Should some major crisis make this difficult, I must be notified as far in advance as possible. Excuses for illness must be accompanied by a medical certificate. Term-papers are due at class time on the assigned date - late papers will incur the penalty of the loss of a grade level per teaching day late (M-F). Students who fail to complete the course work, without consulting me and/or requesting in writing an IN "incomplete," will receive a final grade of "F". Incompletes are only given under the most severe circumstances [university policy]. Students should activate their GMU e-mail accounts at once as I contact the class this way and students are responsible for making sure that they receive these communications. Full in-boxes are no excuse.

## OUTLINE OF COURSE

Please note that all the Required Texts should be read, from cover to cover, as soon as possible. Students should find and read about the weekly topics in these texts using the Indices. There will be handouts.

Week 1 1/22, 1/24: An introduction to the topography, geography, society and history of Egypt and a survey of the religion (Brewer and Teeter is your background text and should be read thoroughly and particularly where reference is made in the syllabus; Manley – you may omit Part V if you wish; David 1-35)

Week 2 1/29, 1/31: Week 1 continued and the world of the gods and the major divinities of Egypt begun (Armour 41-53, 70-157; 160-189; David 37-211 and for the next two weeks)

Week 3 2/5, 2/7: The gods of Egypt continued

Week 4 2/12, 2/14: The gods of Egypt concluded

Week 5 2/19, 2/21 Creation, the cosmos and the relevant myths (Armour 4-40, 54-69; David under "Creation Myths" in Index 461)

Week 6 2/26, 2/28: Test and topics of Week 5 concluded

Week 7 3/4, 3/6: The structure and function of the temples (Brewer and Teeter 159-164; David all entries under "temple" Index 485)

Spring Break (10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> March)

Week 8 3/18, 3/20 The structure and function of the temples – Research Paper due (B&T, David – as above)

Week 9 3/25, 3/27: Pharaohs - the divine kings - (B&T chap. 5; David – under "kings" Index 470)

Week 10 4/1, 4/3: Death and the Afterlife (B&T chap. 10; Egyptian Myths 50-61)

Week 11 4/8, 4/10: Death and the Afterlife

Week 12: Death and the afterlife concluded [4/15]; Akhenaten and the cult of the Aten (sun-disk) begun [4/17] (handout; David 212-245)

Week 13: The end of Akhenaten [4/22]; a brief introduction to hieroglyphs and the reading of a few common funerary inscriptions – Term Paper due [4/24] (B&T chap. 8

Week 14: 4/29, 5/1: Hieroglyphs (continued)

Week 15 Week 14 continued and time to cover any material remaining - and there will be!

Final Exam - Thursday May 11<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m.