HON 366  
Deities and Demons: Ancient and Modern  

Catalog Description:
Prerequisite: acceptance to the University Honors Program, or consent of instructor. 
Embark on a journey to ancient Mesopotamia through an examination of myths and rituals from the “cradle of civilization.” Our journey moves thematically through the literature exploring creation, afterlife, deities, magic, witchcraft, sexuality, and gender roles, with special attention to modern expressions of these ancient themes. (Offered as needed.) 3 credits.

Learning Outcomes:
Through an analysis of ancient literature (myths, rituals, narratives, legal accounts) and archaeological remains (iconography, architecture, artifacts) you will understand the social, historical, political, and religious development of the ancient Near Eastern cultures.

While these texts originated within their unique socio-historical context, many of the ideas and concerns they contain, such as life, death, afterlife, societal and gender roles are still relevant for today. By understanding the variant interpretations and applications of these texts, and how they have influenced the development of Western society, you should gain insight into how ancient ideas resurface in modernity.

We will apply a variety of theoretical and interdisciplinary methodologies (feminist critique, ideological criticism, comparative studies, textual criticism, historical analysis, etc) to these primary texts to develop critical thinking skills and to understand that all texts have multiple meanings. For example, in comparing different translations of the cuneiform texts, you will grasp the power of language and the transmission of ideas. A feminist approach to the text will aid in understanding society and gender roles. The diversity of opinions encountered in the readings and in the class discussions will necessarily provoke the scholarly question of how one reads such ancient texts.

You will develop effective communication skills, specifically in the areas of written and oral exposition and analysis, through formal and informal writing assignments, class presentations.

In addition to class time (discussing course readings, group-exercises, and shared
projects, we will have guest speakers and field trips, providing the context for active learning and engaging with others.

**Course Objectives and Goals:**

- Gain an appreciation and familiarity with the content, dating, themes, and literary genres of classic Mesopotamian literature
- Explore the cultural, historical, and socio-political world of the ancient Mesopotamia and understand its influence on modern society
- Employ theoretical and critical methodologies in the study of ancient texts
- Understand how religion acts as both a response to and as an expression of the human condition.
- Develop writing, oral presentation, and critical thinking skills. Critical thinking develops the ability to construct and discern relationships, analyze arguments, and solve complex problems

**Content:**

Topics include:

- Mesopotamian Religion: Gods, Goddess, Demons
- Mesopotamian Iconography and Art
- History and Archaeology
- Cuneiform writing
- Genres of Mesopotamian Literature
- Theories of Myth
- Creation and Myths of Origin
- Flood Myths
- Underworld Myths
- Prayers and Hymns
- Astrology and Divination
- Incantations and Love Spells
- Exorcism, Witchcraft and Magic
- Religious Festivals including the New Year festival
- Deities and Demons today
- Mesopotamia in Popular Culture

Some of the major myths covered:

- Gilgamesh
- Enuma Elish (Creation Epic)
- Atrahasis
- Adapa and the South Wind
- Ishtar’s Descent into Underworld
- Nergal and Ereshkigal
- Enki and Ninhursag
• Enki and Ninmah
• Enki and the World Order

Current Required Texts:
Handouts and articles on Blackboard.

Instructional Strategies:
Classroom time will be spent mainly in discussion and group in-class assignments, with some mini-lectures and multimedia presentations to establish context. Students will utilize primary texts and scholarly articles or commentaries on those texts.

Methods of Evaluation:
Blog: 30%
Group Project: 20%
Class Participation: 20%
Research Project: 30%

Class Participation: Your participation grade will include a combination of factors: class attendance, arriving for class on time, preparation for the class session and discussions, participation in small group discussions, asking and answering appropriate questions during the lectures, attentiveness during class, etc. Many classes will have in-class assignments that count towards your grade. If you miss that particular class, you will not be able to make up the assignment.

Readings: You will read primary texts and scholarly articles or commentaries on these texts. Primary texts often require multiple readings. (See handout- “How to read ancient Literature”). Informal writing, both in and outside class will be required.

Group Myth/Ritual Project: Creative collaborative project on a myth or ritual of your choice. Projects will be presented to the class and peer-reviewed by class members.
Some suggestions for the project:
• Children’s storybook
• Comic strip
• Artwork (picture, sculpture, etc.)
• Short story or novella
• Song/Musical/Music video
• Movie/YouTube video
• TV commercial
• Website/Blog/Wiki
• Play or other dramatic performance
Short story or novella
Poem
Game

Weekly Blog Questions: This blog is designed to help you comprehend and synthesize the readings, as well as to help you develop your critical thinking and writing skills. Academic blogs are not diary entries. Most of your blog entries will address specific questions or prompts which allow you to explore a topic in greater detail or apply a theoretical model to a given case study. Many of your blog entries/in-class assignments will require various forms of written communication (i.e., first person accounts, comparisons, resume forms, personal correspondences, outlines, expository writing, case studies, opinion papers etc.) Each blog entry will be at least 2 pages (approx. 500-600 words) for each entry, but you are free to write as much as you want. The content of your writing and reflection rather than quantity should be your guiding factor.

Research Paper: A research paper (10-12 pages) on a topic of your choice. The final research paper will involve several components which will be due throughout the semester:

- Paper Proposal
- Annotated Bibliography
- Personal Consultation /Outline
- Research Paper
- Class discussion of research paper

Chapman University Academic Integrity Policy:
The course syllabus should include the following statement:
Chapman University is a community of scholars which emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated anywhere in the university.

Students with Disabilities Policy:
The course syllabus should include the following statement:
In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. The University, through the Center for Academic Success, will work with the appropriate faculty member who is asked to provide the accommodations for a student in determining what accommodations are suitable based on the documentation and the individual student needs. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

Select Bibliography:


Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature. “Gilgamesh and the Netherworld.” http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/


Prepared by: Julye Bidmead, Fall 2011

Last revised: Julye Bidmead, Fall 2011