

## REL 112g Religions of Ancient Egypt and the Near East



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Teaching Assistant: Ericka Swensson, Lecturer in History & Religion

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**Class location:**

Lecture:	T-Th 2-3:20..... VKC 102
Discussion:	60127 Tuesday 10:00-10:50am VKC 154
	60128 Tuesday 11:00-11:50am VKC 154
	60129 Thursday 10:00-10:50am VKC 154
	60130 Thursday 11:00-11:50am VKC 154

### Course Description:

This course is intended to meet the requirements for the existing GE Category II, Global Cultures and Traditions, and category GE-H Traditions and Historical Foundations and GE-B Humanistic Inquiry. No prior background is assumed or required. Students of all majors can succeed in this course.

Egypt and the societies of the ancient Middle East are a source of enduring fascination, both as places of mystery and as places where radical changes in human history and thinking occurred. By reading ancient texts in English translation, we gain a privileged view of the belief systems and life practices of Egypt, the Hittite world, Sumer, Babylon, Mitanni, Hurri, Elam, Israel and Canaan. This course takes us back hundreds, even thousands, of years before the earliest copies of the Bible were placed in secret caves overlooking the Dead Sea or Alexander the Great's armies spread Greek ideas and victories to the edges of the known world.

Many of the ideas of Ancient Egypt and the Near East resonate in our own laws, social mores, stories, and even in our beliefs about ourselves. Some were transmitted through the classical traditions of Greece, Rome, and India, while others were preserved in Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Through illustrated lectures, readings, optional fieldtrips, and discussions, we will discover what an ideal death was like; how the world was created; what justified killing another human being; how eternal life could be achieved and what it was like; and how to use magic, sorcery, and divination.

Emphasis is placed on reading primary textual sources (in translation) and on material culture (the archaeological finds) including hands-on access to ancient objects in USC's own collection.

### Learning Objectives:

1. Develop an understanding of the beliefs of the ancient societies of the Middle East and Egypt and be able to articulate these in class discussions.
2. Recognize the dynamism of ancient religious systems through time, including the diverse ways that humans, gods, and the world relate to each other in the ancient societies of the Middle East and Egypt.
3. Be able to articulate the distinctions and similarities in the systems of ancient religious belief and action encountered in this course through clear and persuasive writing.
4. Become aware of the relevance of ancient traditions to our contemporary society and be able to recognize themes derived from the distant past when they are invoked in claims for prestige, resources, and territory.
5. Develop an awareness of the persistent features of the ancient systems of belief covered in this course in relation to the development of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.
6. Develop an awareness of how you can learn through your own self-directed investigations, whether of self, your environment, or the syllabus which contains information about readings for each week and which should be used preferentially as the source to answer the question: "what is the reading for today?"

*You will need these **required textbooks**. These will be made available at USC Bookstore or they can be purchased new or used via online sellers.*

- 1 – Gilgamesh (translated by Andrew George) Available in Penguin Classics series starting in 2003. Don't order other translations. ISBN: 9780140449198
- 2 - From Distant Days: Myths, Tales, and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia By Benjamin Foster 1995 CDL Press. ISBN: 9781883053093
- 3 - Ritual and Cult at Ugarit Dennis Pardee SBL Press, 2002. ISBN: 9781589830264
- 4 - Stories from Ancient Canaan Michael Coogan and Mark Smith (eds). 2012. ISBN: 9780664241841
- 5 - Hattusha Guide: A Day in the Hittite Capital by Jurgen Seeher 2006. ISBN: 9799758071455
- 6 - The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day: The Complete Papyrus of Ani, translated by Ogden Goelet and Raymond Faulkner. 2015. ISBN: 9781452144382
- 7 – Custom Reader from USC Bookstore

*These following two short books are **recommended** as historical background:*

The Ancient Near East by Amanda Podany ISBN: 9780195377996

Ancient Egypt by Ian Shaw ISBN: 9780192854193