

IMPORTANT COURSE POLICIES

The last day to add this class is **January 19**.

This is an in-person class. Remote instruction will cease when we are allowed to return to campus. At that point, there will be no further Zoom recordings.

If you enroll in this course after the start of the semester, you have to complete all course assignments from the **beginning** of the semester. This includes readings and lecture assignments, posted on Perusall.

You **must attend class** on the days of the midterm exams (**February 2, February 23, March 23 and April 13**). If you cannot be in class on any of these dates, don't take the course!

No electronic devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.) can be used when we return to in-person sessions in the classroom.

GESM 120g—SECTION 35383

Spring 2022

Christianity in the Roman Empire

Instructor: Prof. Sheila Briggs

Place and Time: GFS 105, MW 3.30 - 4.50

Office Hours: M 12.50-1.50 (drop-in); W 12.50-1.50 (by appointment only). Students can meet with the instructor on Zoom outside of the stated office hours. In Spring 2022 all office hours will take place on Zoom until further notice.

Contact Info: Email: sbriggs@usc.edu ; phone number (office): 213-740-0267

Course Description and Learning Objectives

In this course we study the development of Christianity in the ancient Mediterranean during the early centuries of the Common Era. You will read original texts, written not only by ancient Christians but also by adherents of other religious traditions in the Roman Empire. The goal of this course is to place early Christianity in its original historical context, i.e., as a Greco-Roman religion. We will explore the great diversity among and between early Christian groups and communities and the conflicts which this engendered. By the end of the course a comprehensive picture will have emerged of Christianity's place among and interactions with other Greco-Roman religions and of how Christianity and Greco-Roman religions in general were related to the society and culture of the Roman Empire.

In this course you will:

- Define the basic concepts of religion in the Roman Empire
- Identify how these basic concepts were translated into the practices, structures and institutions of religion in the Roman Empire
- Interpret what ancient texts about Christians and Christianity meant in their original context
- Compare the different forms of Christianity, represented in the ancient texts
- Distinguish later interpretations of these texts (including our own) from those of the original context.

- Analyze how modern scholars have interpreted texts and other evidence about ancient Christianity
- Critique modern scholarship on ancient Christianity and its texts

Assessment and Assignments

Cumulative mid-term examination (40% of the grade in total). These are four short exams that take place in-class on the following dates **February 2, February 23, March 23 and April 13.**

One final examination in-class from 2-4 pm on **Friday May 7.** It will carry 20% of the course grade.

One **research paper** of 8 pages that will carry 30% of the grade. This entails students doing their own research. The paper is due on **April 27**, our last class session. Further details for the preparation and submission of the paper will be given later in the semester.

All examinations (midterm and final) are open-book, which means that you can use textbooks, notes and other material, distributed in the course, in the exam. For in-class examinations you are not allowed to use a computer or any electronic device during the exam and you will also need to bring with you a blue book to write your answers.

Students should have completed the required reading (and lecture on Perusall) by the session for which it is assigned.

Course attendance and participation make up 10% of the grade. Course participation will also be assessed by student's engagement in class discussions and their completion of the Perusall assignments on course readings and lectures. Students are allowed **six** excused absences for any reason but these six also **include illness, personal emergency or USC sporting events.** After that students will lose a course point (1% of the course grade) for each absence from class.

Detailed instructions will be given for each assignment.

Grading Scale

Grades in the course will be determined using the following scale

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	64-66

D- 60-63
F 59 and below

Required Reading

Please, use only the editions of textbooks specified. Do not use Kindle editions or ebook formats that are not exact equivalents of the print edition, especially in regard to page numbering.

J. B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007)
Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).
Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, trans. and ed. Clayton N. Jefford (Salem, Oregon: Polebridge Press, 2013).
Acts of Andrew, trans. and ed. Dennis R. MacDonald (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 2005).

Other readings from Pagan, Jewish and Christian sources and about their background will be made available through Blackboard.

Course Schedule

January 10: Introduction to the Course.

Religion in the Roman Empire

January 12: Identifying "religion" in the Greco-Roman world. Reading: Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, pp. 1-53. Lecture on Perusall: *How do we know what we know about the ancient past?*

January 17: Martin Luther King Day holiday

January 19: The diversity of religious traditions in the Roman Empire. Reading: Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, pp. 54-88. Lectures on Perusall: *A Quick History of the Ancient World: Part 1, The Hellenistic World* and *A Quick History of the Ancient World: Part 2, The Roman World*.

January 24: The gods and their communities. Reading: Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, pp. 89-131. Lectures on Perusall: *Were the Traditional Religions of the Roman Empire "Polytheistic"?* and *The Hierarchy of the Divine*.

January 26: Religion and empire; religious options. Reading: Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, pp. 132-181.

January 31: Roman religious policy; religious change in the empire. Reading: Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, pp. 182-210.

February 2: Midterm 1

Roman and Greek Attitudes to Christians in the First Two Centuries

February 7: Pliny: A Roman gentleman. Reading: Wilken, pp. 1-30; ancient source on Blackboard and Perusall. Lecture on Perusall: *Ancient City*.

February 9: Christianity as a burial society. Reading: Wilken, pp. 31-47. The piety of the persecutors. Reading: Wilken, pp. 48-67; ancient sources on Blackboard and Perusall. Lecture on Perusall: *The Ancient Mysteries and Early Christianity: Part 1*.

February 14: Galen: The curiosity of a philosopher Reading: Wilken, pp. 68-93; ancient sources on Blackboard and Perusall. Lecture on Perusall: *The Ancient Mysteries and Early Christianity: Part 2*.

February 16: Celsus: A conservative intellectual. Reading: Wilken, pp. 94-125; ancient source on Blackboard and Perusall. Lecture on Perusall: *Ancient Magic and Early Christians*.

February 21: President's Day Holiday

February 23: Midterm 2

Christianity and Judaism

February 28: Christians in the Jewish tradition. Reading: *Didache*, pp. 1-18. Lecture on Perusall: *How the Ways Parted: The Changing Boundaries of Jewish and Christian Identities in Antiquity, Part 1: Multiple Identities*.

March 2: Christians in the Jewish tradition. Reading: *Didache*, pp. 19-47. Lecture on Perusall: *How the Ways Parted: Changing Boundaries of Jewish and Christian Identities in Antiquity, Part 2: Networks*.

March 7-9: When and how did Jews and Christians part ways? Reading: Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (extract available on Blackboard and on Perusall). Lecture on Perusall (March 7): *How the Ways Parted: Changing Boundaries of Jewish and Christian Identities in Antiquity, Part 3: Lost Communities*.

Spring Break: March 14-15

March 21: The development of scripture in early Christianity. Reading: Martin, *Development of the Canon* (available on Blackboard). Lecture on Perusall: *Scripture in Early Christianity*.

March 23: Mid-term 3.

The Apocryphal Acts and Popular Christianity

March 28: Reading: *Acts of Andrew*, pp. 1-42. Lecture on Perusall: *Narratives of the Apostles*.

March 30: Reading: *Acts of Andrew*, pp. 43-115. Lecture on Perusall: *The Acts of Andrew: Reconstructing a Text from Fragments*.

Martyrdom in Early Christianity

April 4 Reading: "Blood of the Martyrs," a chapter from: Gillian Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society* (available on Blackboard and Perusall).

April 6 Jewish and Christian Martyrdom. Readings (available on Blackboard and Perusall): 2 Maccabees 7, *Martyrdom of Polycarp*

April 11: Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas. Reading: *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (available on Blackboard and Perusall). Lecture on Perusall: *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*.

April 13: Mid-term 4.

The Transition to a Christian Empire

April 18: Porphyry: The Most Learned Critic of All. Reading: Wilken, pp. 126-163. Lecture on Perusall: *The Christianization of the Roman Empire: In Search of a Common Religion, Part 1*.

April 20: Julian the Apostate: Jewish Law and Christian Faith: Reading: Wilken, pp.164-196. Lecture on Perusall: *The Christianization of the Roman Empire: In Search of a Common Religion, Part 2*.

April 25: Winners and losers in the Christian Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Heretics. Reading: Wilken, pp. 197-205; the law codes of Theodosius and Justinian. (available on Blackboard and Perusall). Lecture on Perusall: *The Christianization of the Roman Empire: In Search of a Common Religion—Constantine*.

April 27: The Christian suppression of pagan religions. (Reading available on Blackboard and Perusall). Lecture on Perusall: *The Christianization of the Roman Empire: In Search of a Common Religion: Violence and Assimilation*.

COURSE POLICIES AND RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

No electronic devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.) can be used during the in-person sessions in the classroom on campus. They are a distraction not only for the user but for those around them.

You can contact the instructor through email. If your email needs a response, you will receive one in 48 hours (except at weekends).

You will find this course more manageable if from the outset of your college career you develop good academic habits.

Don't cut class. You are expected to attend every session. If you miss class, then you are left to your own resources to make up the lost work.

Submit written assignments punctually. Late assignments may lose points or not be graded at all! If you are having difficulties completing an assignment, contact the instructor as soon as possible, before or by the time the assignment is due. It is always easier to accommodate student requests for time extensions on assignments, when these are presented *before* an assignment is due. The instructor must submit the final course grade soon after the final examination. The final course grade is precisely that. The instructor cannot alter it, and even students with compelling reasons for not completing the work on time have to undergo a long petition process, which is often unsuccessful.

This course requires substantial writing, but is not intended to offer instruction in writing. Many of you will find it hard to reach the standards of college-level writing. The **Writing Center** is there to help you. You can have up to two 30-minute appointments per week depending upon availability. Writing Center consultants will help you develop ideas and arguments and revise rough drafts for the research paper you produce in the course. There are also workshops covering every aspect of writing where you can improve your skills in specific areas. The Writing Center can be found on the second floor of Taper Hall (Room 216) and appointments and sign-ups for workshops can be made over the phone (213-740-3691). You can also try just walking in, but then you are not guaranteed an appointment, and the center at times will be very busy.

All students are expected to know and follow USC's rules on **academic integrity**. Students must acknowledge all sources (books, journals, videos, web-based and electronic materials, etc.) used in an assignment, whether these are directly quoted, paraphrased or their main ideas summarized. Students should retain notes and any other material that can substantiate that they produced their

work consistent with the rules on academic integrity. Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards”

<https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b>.

Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a **disability** is required to register with the Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for OSAS is (213) 740-0776 (email: osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

If an officially declared emergency (other than the current pandemic!) makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.