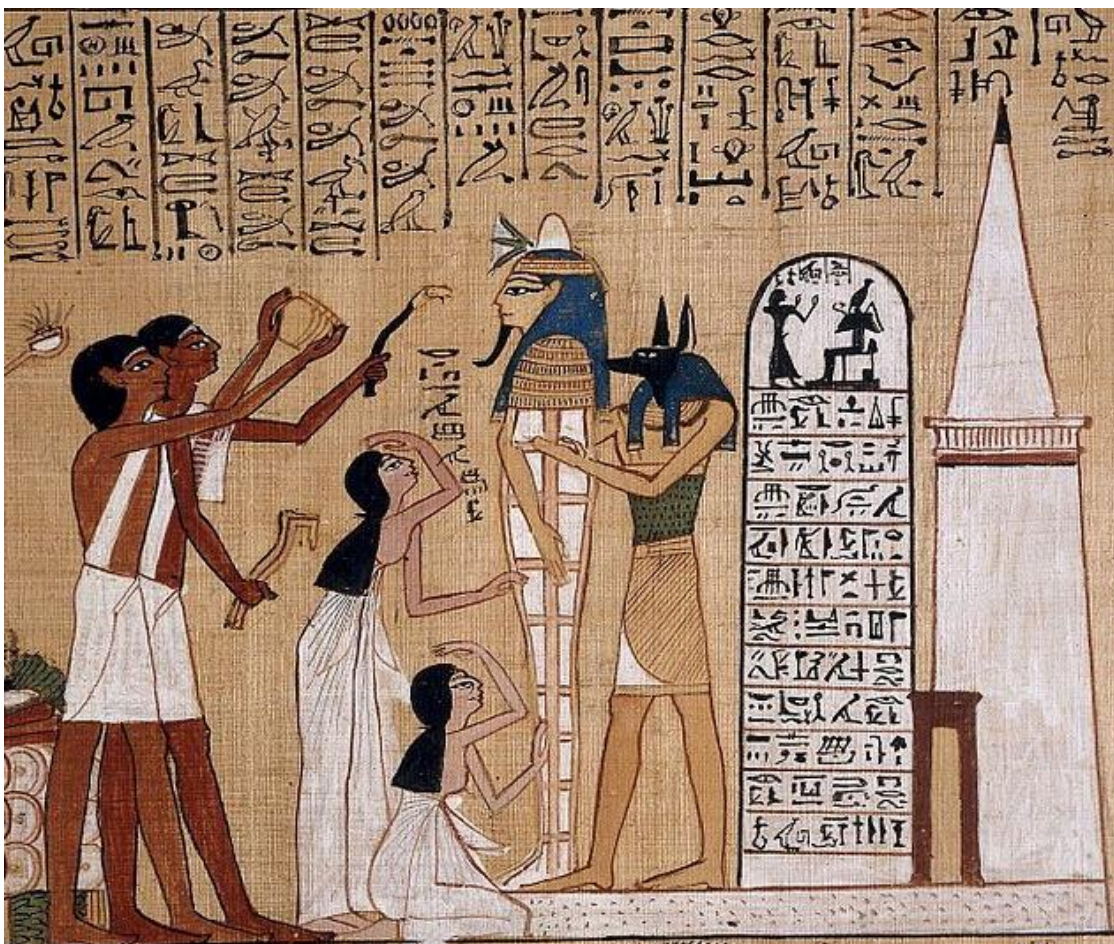


RELS 203/303
Ancient Religion:
Egypt to Mesopotamia

Pre-Christmas Summer School, 2020



The Opening of the Mouth ceremony (1275 BC), EA 9901 (British Museum)

Course Outline & Study Guide

COURSE DESCRIPTION

RELS 203/303 examines some of the key religious practices, beliefs and texts of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Levant, ca. 3000–300 BCE. In this paper we explore the religious ideas and practices of three civilisations of the ancient world: their gods and goddesses, their temples and priests, their attempts to communicate with the divine and to exercise power via magic, as well as their foundational myths and their expectations concerning the afterlife. Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Levant (Syria-Aram, Palestine/Israel, Phoenicia, Philistia, and the Transjordan) fascinated early European explorers and scholars, their long-lost religious texts shedding light on the world from which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam later evolved. While demonstrating such influences, the paper will focus on understanding Ancient Near Eastern religion in its own right and in relation to debates within recent scholarship.

The course will proceed around what is known as the Fertile Crescent in the Ancient Near East, traveling broadly from the east to the west:

Lectures 1-9: Mesopotamia

Lectures 10-15: The Levant

Lectures 16-23: Egypt



ABOUT THE LECTURER

Deane Galbraith lectures on Judaism, Ancient Religion (Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Levantine), Conspiracy Theories, and in the introductory course to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Deane's major areas of research include the development of traditions within the Jewish Pentateuch, contemporary Evangelical prophecy movements, and resurrection stories. He is also the founding editor of *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception*, a journal examining the influence and effects of religious traditions within history and modern culture.

Please contact him either by telephone or email:

Dr. Deane Galbraith | deane.galbraith@otago.ac.nz | 03-479 4232 (office) 021-236-6294 (mob)
Office hours: Room 4S9, 4th Floor Te Tumu, after class or by appointment.

ABOUT THE TUTOR

Cameron Coombe (also called Camo) has a PhD from the University of Otago, on the work of Jürgen Moltmann, a modern German theologian. He has previously tutored Ancient Religion and the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament course at Otago.

Please contact him by email or text for matters related to the tutorials:

Cameron Coombe | cameron.coombe@gmail.com | 022-183-9203

ESSENTIAL COURSE COMPONENTS:

To complete this course successfully, you will need to (1) attend or view all your lectures; (2) complete your required readings contained in the Course Readings books; (3) follow the Study Guide; (4) attend one online tutorial per week; and (5) consult Blackboard regularly.

1. LECTURES are held Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, with a two-hour lecture each Wednesday. Whether you have enrolled as an on-campus or distance student, you have the option of: either attending lectures on the Otago campus; viewing lectures online via Blackboard; or a combination of the two, as it suits. Lectures build upon each other, and assume you have heard and understood the material in earlier lectures. Together with the required readings, the material in each lecture forms the basis for the multichoice questions in the test. Copies of the PowerPoint slides for each lecture will be made available on Blackboard after each lecture.
2. The COURSE READINGS books contain all of the required readings, and are available as pdfs via Blackboard. These contain all the readings necessary for lectures, and to complete your assessment for the course. There are three separate Course Readings books on each of A) Mesopotamia; B) The Levant; and C) Egypt. You should aim to complete your readings before each lecture, as lectures both explain and build upon the required readings

In addition, **only for those taking the RELS 303 paper**, there is a fourth Course Reading book containing some *additional* readings required at Stage Three.

3. A STUDY GUIDE is included at the end of this Course Guide. This provides an introduction to your readings within an overview of each topic in the course. You should follow the Study Guide when you do your readings, as this provides the context for each of your readings and explains many key terms and concepts you will encounter in your readings.
4. ONLINE TUTORIALS are run twice each week, via the online Zoom videoconferencing software, and you should aim to log in at <https://otago.zoom.us/j/778182524> and attend one tutorial each week. The purpose of the online tutorials is to provide a forum to answer any questions you may have about your readings. So if you don't understand something in your readings, write down your question, ask it in the tutorial, and your tutor will attempt to help you understand it. First, you will need to download the Zoom videoconferencing software. See <https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/zoom/gettingstarted/> for instructions. If you have any difficulties, please contact the ITS helpdesk (<http://www.otago.ac.nz/its/contacts/>).
5. BLACKBOARD: This course relies heavily on the web-based program, Blackboard. Please make sure you have access to this. In particular, the assessments require access to Blackboard, and so also require that you have reliable internet access. If you require assistance, please contact the ITS helpdesk (<http://www.otago.ac.nz/its/contacts/>).

Blackboard uses your University email address, so please make sure that you check your university email at least every couple of days, or arrange for forwarding of your university emails to your personal email account.

LECTURE SCHEDULE

Date	No.	Topic
Monday 9 Nov	A1	Flood!
Wednesday 11 Nov	A2	Mesopotamian religion: Historical contexts
	A3	Dying-and-Rising gods and goddesses: Dumuzi and Inanna, and Nature Religion
Thursday 12 Nov	A4	Enuma Elish: The Rise of Marduk (and Babylon)
Friday 13 Nov	A5	Gilgamesh and Kingship: Divine or human?
Monday 16 Nov	A6	Gilgamesh and Death: An undifferentiated afterlife?
Wednesday 18 Nov	A7	Maintaining the Great Gods: Temple and sacrifice
	A8	Spells, Incantations, and Witchcraft
Thursday 19 Nov	A9	Good Omens: Divine messages in livers
Friday 20 Nov	B1	The Levant and the Baal Cycle
Monday 23 Nov	B2	From Canaanite El and Baal to the God of Israel
Wednesday 25 Nov	B3	Introducing Mrs God: Asherah
	B4	Death in the Levant
Thursday 26 Nov	B5	Why are there Giants in the Bible?
Friday 27 Nov	B6	The Origin of Archangels
Wednesday 2 Dec	C1	From the Pyramids to the Pharaohs: a history of Egypt
	C2	The Gods of Egypt: Creation and Osiris
Thursday 3 Dec	C3	The Gods of Egypt: Re the Sun God
Friday 4 Dec	C4	Death is not the End: Judgment and the Afterlife
Monday 7 Dec	C5	Books of the Netherworld, Letters to the Dead
Wednesday 9 Dec	C6	Doing <i>Ma'at</i> : Egyptian Ethics and Order
	C7	Akhenaton and the Monotheistic Revolution
Thursday 10 Dec	C8	Farewell Akhenaton: the Origins of Ancient Religion

ASSESSMENT

The assessment for this course is comprised as follows:

1. Assignment Outline	5%
2. Assignment	25%
3. Multichoice test	70%

1. Assignment Outline

(5% of total assessment)

Due Friday 20 November at 5:00pm

First read through the instructions for the Assignment (due 4 December) and its accompanying Guidelines, below.

Then, write a one-page outline for your Assignment, in which you EITHER:

(Option 1)

- Provide a short 3- to 5-sentence summary of your proposed incantation and instructions.
- Provide a list of primary sources from Mesopotamia that you will rely upon in completing your assignment.
- Provide a list of secondary sources that you intend to use in completing your assignment.

OR *(Option 2)*

- Provide a short 3- to 5-sentence summary of your proposed essay.
- Provide a list of primary sources from Mesopotamia that you will rely upon in completing your assignment.
- Provide a list of secondary sources that you intend to use in completing your assignment.

You should cite at least three relevant sources for each of (b) and (c). A list of sources available online is provided on Blackboard under the Assignment tab. But you are of course welcome to select other academic-level readings based on your own research.

Format your references according to the Bibliography formatting in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. A summary of the Bibliography format is available on pages 26-31 in the Religion Programme's *Study and Style Guide*, available here: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/religion/pdfs/styleguide.pdf>. Use this format for your assignment, too. If you make a citation, use footnotes. A summary of the footnote format is available on pages 14-22 in the *Study and Style Guide*.

Please also read the sections below on "Submitting written work", "Deadlines, Extensions, and Late Submission", "Plagiarism", and "Style Guide" before beginning the Assignment Outline and Assignment.

2. Assignment

(2000-2500 words; 25% of total assessment)

Due Friday 4 December at 5:00pm

Option 1

- a. Using Mesopotamian texts as models, create an incantation, with instructions for accompanying rituals and accoutrements; AND
- b. provide a commentary on key features of your incantation and its accompanying rituals and accoutrements

Guidelines:

- For the purpose of this assignment, you should imagine that you are a knowledgeable ancient expert seer (*barn*). The incantation should be set in an ancient Mesopotamian context, and modelled on specific ancient examples. You may refer to events in the ancient world. Make sure you specify the oral components and ritual actions and equipment that are a part of the procedure as well as the inscribed or written component.
- In your commentary, you are expected to explain the ancient context of the magical ritual, the agent, the target (object, event, or person), and the means by which the magical ritual operates. Also, you should discuss why you chose certain elements for your incantation. So, if relevant, explain why you chose to invoke specific gods, employ specific material objects, involve other experts and personnel, stage the ritual at a specific time or date, select certain words, and/or include certain ritual actions. You should explain why you selected these particular elements and how they work in the incantation and accompanying ritual that you have created—based on how they fit into the historical incantations upon which you relied. Cite any particular historical examples upon which you relied to create your incantation. Since incantations were adapted for specific contexts and clients, you don't have to stick to ancient examples, but can exercise a reasonable degree of freedom to innovate. Also note: you have the opportunity in this assignment to choose to name certain gods or goddesses that you might be interested in studying in more depth, or types of rituals that you find more interesting or fruitful.
- Be creative.
- Include footnotes to cite all your sources. A summary of the footnote format is available on pages 14-22 in the Religion Programme's *Study and Style Guide*, available here: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/religion/pdfs/styleguide.pdf>.
- Include a bibliography at the end, which separates out primary and secondary sources. This may differ from the sources included in your Assignment Outline, as you further consider the requirements for the assignment. A summary of the Bibliography format is available on pages 26-31 in the Religion Programme's *Study and Style Guide*. There is a list of sources available online on Blackboard, under the Assignment tab.

Option 2

Answer the following question, in essay form:

How do verbal incantations and materiality combine in Maqlû to create, in the Mesopotamian imaginary, an effective ritual? Discuss some of the ways they combine and the ends they thereby seek to achieve.

Guidelines:

- Include footnotes to cite all your sources. A summary of the footnote format is available on pages 14-22 in the Religion Programme's *Study and Style Guide*, available here: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/religion/pdfs/styleguide.pdf>.
- Include a bibliography at the end, which separates out primary and secondary sources. This may differ from the sources included in your Assignment Outline, as you further consider the requirements for the assignment. A summary of the Bibliography format is available on pages 26-31 in the Religion Programme's *Study and Style Guide*. There is a list of sources available online on Blackboard, under the Assignment tab.

3. Multichoice test

(70% of total assessment)

Saturday 12 December, 9:00-11:00am (NZ time)

The online multichoice test will be available via Blackboard, and is 2 hours in duration. It contains 70 multichoice questions, which are based on your required readings, Study Guide, and lectures.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have access to a computer or other device, as well as a reliable and fast internet connection throughout this time.

You may consult any written notes or other sources during that time. But you must complete the multichoice test on your own, without any communication with any other person. You may not discuss the multichoice questions with any other person until after 11:00am, Saturday 12 December, and if you are found to have done so, this will be considered cheating and will result in disciplinary procedures.

For RELS 203 students, the Required Readings are included in the three Course Readings books discussed above on page 3. For RELS 303 students only, the Required Readings are included in the three Course Readings books plus the fourth book of Additional Course Readings.

Submitting Written Work

All students must submit their work electronically (as a Word or document file, *not* as a pdf) via the "Assignment" feature on Blackboard, by 5:00pm on each due date.

All on-campus students should also hand in a printed copy of their assignment in the Religion Programme's assignment box, Level 4, Te Tumu building, by 5:00pm on the due date. If you are enrolled on-campus, but not in Dunedin, this requirement is waived.

You may email your tutor the assignment outline or assignment ONLY if you have trouble accessing Blackboard. You will be responsible for confirming that your work has been uploaded to Blackboard and/or received by me. "I submitted/emailed it" does not work as an excuse, sorry. Before you submit your essay, make a backup copy, either in electronic form or on paper, and keep it in a safe place.

On your cover sheet, include the following details: whether you are completing Option 1 or Option 2; your full name; your Student ID; the paper number; the due date; and (for the Assignment, not the Assignment Outline) a word count of the body text (excluding bibliography and footnotes).

Deadlines, Extensions, and Late Submission

Students have full responsibility for the prompt submission of assignments. An extension of the due date may be granted only in HIGHLY exceptional circumstances, usually on medical grounds. In the event of an extension being obtained on medical grounds, a doctor's certificate verifying the need for an extension should be attached to the assignment when it is submitted. Please note that poor time management is not acceptable as a reason for seeking an extension.

Late submissions may be penalized at a rate of 5% of the assignment marks if one day late, and 5% each additional weekday late thereafter.

Plagiarism

Students should make sure that all work submitted is their own and should fill in and attach a signed coversheet to their essay. Plagiarism is a form of dishonest practice. Plagiarism is defined as:

- Copying or paraphrasing another person's work and presenting it as your own
- Being party to someone else's plagiarism by letting them copy your work or helping them to copy the work of someone else without acknowledgement
- Using your own work in another situation, such as for the assessment of a different paper or program, without indicating the source

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/academicintegrity/otago006307.html>

For more advice on the plagiarism policy see <https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/academicintegrity/otago006307.html> and the 'Study Smart' section in Blackboard.

The primary way to avoid plagiarism is to ensure that any words you write that rely on another source is properly referenced, and that any direct quotes are placed in quotation marks. This applies to any source, including those on the internet.

Any student found responsible for plagiarism in any piece of work submitted for assessment shall be subject to the University's student academic misconduct procedures (<https://www.otago.ac.nz/administration/policies/otago116850.html>) which may result in various penalties, including forfeiture of marks for the piece of work submitted, a zero grade for the paper, or in extreme cases exclusion from the University.

Style guide

The Religion Programme has its own Style Guide for students, based on the *Chicago Manual of Style*. A copy is available here: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/religion/pdfs/styleguide.pdf>. Please follow it for your assignments, unless you have permission from the lecturer.

In particular, you should provide footnotes (not in-line citations, not endnotes) at the bottom of each page, which should be numbered continuously throughout the essay. You should also provide a bibliography at the end of your assignments, containing references to every source you have either cited or relied on in your reading for the assignment. The reference format for books, articles, websites, and other sources is set out in the Style Guide, with handy examples.

Here is a quick summary of how to format your (1) initial footnotes, (2) second and subsequent footnotes of the same source, and (3) bibliography:

	First footnote	Subsequent footnotes	Bibliography
Book	Zachary Braiterman, <i>(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 35.	Braiterman, <i>(God) After Auschwitz</i> , 35.	Braiterman, Zachary. <i>(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
Section in book	Jack Wertheimer, “Varieties of Orthodox Jews,” in <i>The New American Judaism: How Jews Practice Their Religion Today</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 72.	Wertheimer, “Varieties”, 72.	Wertheimer, Jack. “Varieties of Orthodox Jews.” In <i>The New American Judaism: How Jews Practice Their Religion Today</i> , 71-73, 288. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.
Chapter in edited book	Hava Tirosh-Samuels, “Jewish Mysticism,” in <i>The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture</i> , ed. Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 416.	Tirosh-Samuels, “Jewish Mysticism”, 416.	Tirosh-Samuels, Hava. “Jewish Mysticism.” In <i>The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture</i> , ed. Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, 399–423. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
Journal article	Arye Edrei, “Identity, Politics and Halakhah in Modern Israel,” <i>Journal of Modern Jewish Studies</i> 14, no. 1 (2015), 115.	Edrei, “Identity”, 115.	Edrei, Arye. “Identity, Politics and Halakhah in Modern Israel.” <i>Journal of Modern Jewish Studies</i> 14, no. 1 (2015): 109–25.

Marking rubrics

For the two Assignments, students will receive written feedback from the instructor. You will be marked according to the following rubrics:

1. **BASICS:** Did you follow the prompts listed? (e.g. correct length, submitted properly, on time, academic sources, etc.)
2. **POLISH:** Is the piece free of careless errors? (grammar, spelling, citations etc.)
3. **ARGUMENT/STRUCTURE:** Are answers clearly supported and argued, properly addressing the specific questions or requirements?
4. **CONTENT:** Does the piece show evidence of time spent researching and thinking? Does it build upon, critique, advance ideas and content from class and readings?

STUDY GUIDE

RELS 203/303—ANCIENT RELIGION: EGYPT TO MESOPOTAMIA

This Study Guide provides an introduction to each topic within Ancient Religion, and should be followed when you are doing your required readings.

A. Mesopotamia

A1. Flood!

Only two centuries ago, the civilizations of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia were rediscovered by western explorers, armies, and archaeologists. Their long-buried cities and tombs were excavated and their writings deciphered and translated. This caused a wave of excitement across the world, in particular in Europe. In 1799, French soldiers in Napoleon's invading army discovered a stone containing a text written in both Egyptian and Greek, the Rosetta Stone, which facilitated Jean-François Champollion's later decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs. In 1813, Jean-Louis Burckhardt discovered the Great Temple at Abu Simbel, with its four colossal (20-metre-high) statues of Pharaoh Ramesses II (ca. 1279-1212). In 1922, the largely intact tomb of King Tutankhamun was discovered by Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon, causing a new wave of Egyptomania to spread throughout the West, fuelled in part by the death in Carnarvon in 1923, which was widely suspected to be due to 'the mummy's curse'. In Nineveh, Mesopotamia, in 1853, Hormuzd Rassam discovered tablets of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which formed part of a vast library collected by the seventh-century Assyrian king Ashurbanipal. The tablets were deciphered by a keen amateur expert in cuneiform, George Smith, who in 1872 was excited to realize that Tablet XI preserved an ancient Assyrian parallel to the Bible's story of Noah's Ark and the Great Flood (Genesis 6.5–8.22).

Now read:




Damrosch, David. "Gilgamesh's Quest." In *What is World Literature?* 40-41, 51-56. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.


A second, Babylonian version of the Great Flood story was soon thereafter discovered, in a work called the *Epic of Atrahasis*, dated to the Old Babylonian Period (ca. 1750 BC). *Atrahasis* tells the story of the events leading to the creation of humankind, the means of that creation, the gods' decision to destroy humankind in a Flood because they had got too noisy(!), and the subsequent reordering of human society.

Your reading by Glenn S. Holland summarises the story of the Great Flood in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and your reading by Foster translates all of Tablet XI, which contains the account. The telling of the story of the Great Flood occurs almost at the end of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Yet the Great Flood is said to have occurred many years before Gilgamesh was born, and is told to Gilgamesh by its survivor, Ut-napishtim (who is the equivalent of Noah in the Bible’s version of the Great Flood).

Gilgamesh is the King of Uruk in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which possibly has some historical basis, as Gilgamesh is listed as one of the kings of Uruk, who had reigned in ca. 2700 BC, according to the *Sumerian King List* (various versions of which exist from ca. 2000 BC). Yet the account of Gilgamesh’s exploits in Tablets I to X of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* are hardly historical. They narrate Gilgamesh’s legendary and heroic adventures, such as his battle against a monster Humbaba the Terrible in the Cedar Forest, and another battle against the Bull of Heaven sent by the goddess Ishtar, and Gilgamesh’s journey to the end of the earth, where he then follows the path that the sun travels at night. These accounts should be appreciated as great story-telling, not as the exploits of a historical Gilgamesh.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Holland, Glenn S. “The Great Flood.” In <i>Gods in the Desert: Religions of the ancient Near East</i>, 184-88. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.</p> <p>Foster, “Gilgamesh.” In <i>The Context of Scriptures, Volume 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World</i>, ed. William H. Hallo, 458-60. Leiden: Brill, 2003.</p>
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Contemporary scholarship on texts such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is primarily interested in understanding these texts in their own right, and also to appreciate what they might tell us about the worldviews of the Mesopotamians who composed them. But initial interest in these texts, as we saw in the case of George Smith, was primarily driven by an interest in the Bible, and in particular how Mesopotamian texts lend understanding to the contents of the Bible. In this course, our primary concern is to understand Mesopotamian religious texts and artefacts in themselves. But so that you can appreciate the excitement of nineteenth-century Europeans in their discovery of Mesopotamian parallels to the Bible, have a read of the Bible’s version of the Great Flood (ca. 500 BC), and consider the similarities and differences from what you have read in Tablet XI of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The reading from John H. Walton summarizes some of these similarities and differences.

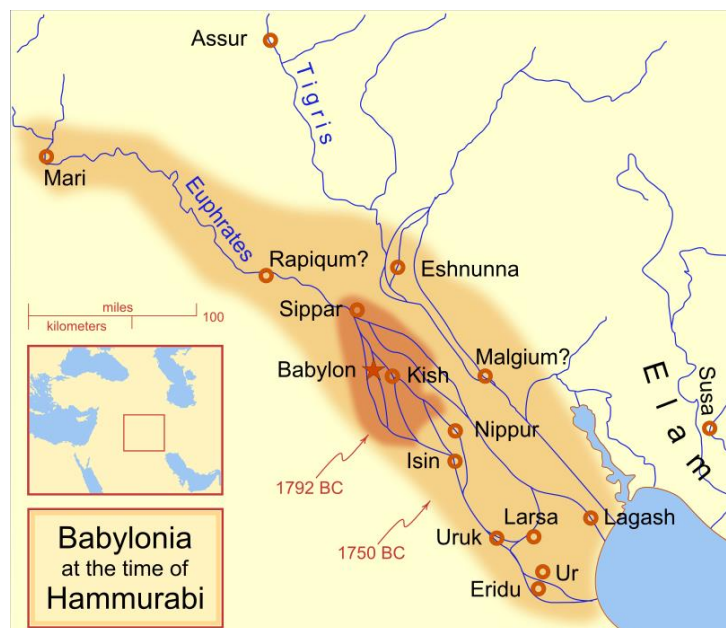
<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Genesis 6.5-8.22. In <i>The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments: New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition</i>, 5-7. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993.</p> <p>Walton, John H. “Flood.” In <i>Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch</i>, 315-18. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003.</p>
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A2. Mesopotamian religion: Historical contexts

The broad geographical area of Mesopotamia was home to a succession of different peoples, kingdoms, and religious systems between the early third millennium and the late first millennium. Despite their differences, they were united by a shared culture, based in cities built between and near the twin rivers of the Tigris and Euphrates, cities which shared a great deal of commonality in their religious ideas and practices. In other words, there is both diversity and unity in what we term 'Mesopotamian religion', whether in geographical terms or across the centuries.

In terms of chronology, the first empire arose in the south of Mesopotamia, the Sumerian empire of the Early Dynastic (ED) period (ca. 2900-2350 BC). The Sumerian empire was centred in the cities of Eridu, Uruk, Kish, Lagash, and Ur, in the south-east of Mesopotamia. This period is sometimes divided into ED 1 (ca. 2900-2800), ED II (2800-2600), and ED III (2600-2334). The Sumerian language differs from the Akkadian language that was used later in Mesopotamia's history, although both employed similar wedge-shaped (cuneiform) writing systems. The end of the Sumerian empire marked the beginning of the short-lived Akkadian Empire (2334-2218 BC), the first to unite the whole of Mesopotamia, under King Sargon (2334-2279 BC). After its collapse, at the hands of invading Amorites and Elamites, the Sumerian empire experienced a renaissance in the period known as Ur III (ca. 2112-2004 BC).


The remainder of Mesopotamian history is divided principally between two Akkadian-speaking peoples: the (southern) Babylonians and (northern) Assyrians. King Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC) united the Amorites to establish the next great Mesopotamian empire in southern Mesopotamia, the Old Babylonian empire, which nonetheless disintegrated soon after Hammurabi's death. Hammurabi was based in the previously minor city of Babylon. The succeeding Kassite Dynasty, ruled by the invading Kassites, ruled Babylonia from 1595-1155 BC. Then followed a renewal of




Babylonian power under Nebuchadnezzar I (1124-1103 BC), a period of power struggles with Assyria who ruled Babylon from the north, and the Neo-Babylonian (or 'Chaldean') Empire founded by Nabopolassar in 620 BC with its most famous king being Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC).

Assyria, to the north of Babylonia, is first mentioned in the mid-third millennium, and after initial domination by Sumeria and Akkadia, established the Old Assyrian Empire from ca. 2025 to ca. 1750 BC, centred in its two major cities Aššur and Nineveh. Assyria then fell to the Babylonians under Hammurabi. The Middle Assyrian Empire was established from 1392 to 1056 BC, and the most powerful and expansive of these empires, the Neo-Assyrian Empire, from 911 to 605 BC,


which at its height ruled over all of the Levant and Egypt. The culmination of millennia of Mesopotamian history came about when the Babylonian and Assyrian peoples came under the rule of the (Persian) Achaemenid Empire from the mid-sixth century BC.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Holland, Glenn S. “Mesopotamia: Historical Survey.” In <i>Gods in the Desert: Religions of the ancient Near East</i>, 100-109. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.</p> <p>Holland, Glenn S. “Ancient Mesopotamia [map].” In <i>Gods in the Desert: Religions of the ancient Near East</i>, xii. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.</p>
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The centrality of certain gods in Mesopotamia was a result of the region’s complex geo-political history. The Sumerian gods became established throughout Mesopotamia in the third millennium, and most of these gods were in turn adopted by the Babylonians and Assyrians, albeit under different names. So for example, the High God of the Sumerian pantheon, An, was known as Anu in Babylon; the supreme ruler on earth, Enlil, was called Ellil; the counsellor to the gods, Enki, was called Ea; and the wild goddess of warfare and fertility, Inanna, was called Ishtar. Your reading from Benjamin R. Foster provides a handy family tree of these and other Mesopotamian gods.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Foster, Benjamin R. “Mesopotamia”. In <i>A Handbook of Ancient Religions</i>, ed. John R. Hinnells, 166. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.</p>
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Each god and goddess in the Mesopotamian pantheon was the ‘patron god’ of a Mesopotamian city, and there is little duplication of patron gods between the Mesopotamian cities. So in the city of Eridu, Enki/Ea was the patron god; for Eshnunna it was Ninazu, god of the underworld; for Lagash it was Ningirsu, god of Earth and rain (Ningirsu being a variant name for the god also called ‘Ninurta’, worshiped with his father Enlil in Nippur); for Larsa it was Utu/Shamash, the sun god; for Nippur it was Enlil, the supreme god on earth; for Ur it was Nanna/Sin, the moon god; for Uruk, the city of Gilgamesh, it was Inanna/Ishtar; and Babylon’s patron god was Marduk. The organization of the pantheon of gods is presumably a result of political alliances, city-leagues, conquests, and empire formation, in a process that took place over many centuries. How they were originally organized into the pantheon is anybody’s guess, but it is clearly associated with political reputations of each city that go back to the early third millennium BC at least. As we shall see, the ranking of gods in the pantheon would continue to change, in various ways, and as a result of later political developments.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Foster, Benjamin R. “Mesopotamia”. In <i>A Handbook of Ancient Religions</i>, ed. John R. Hinnells, 169-79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.</p>
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When it comes to the study of ancient history, we are usually limited by the piecemeal nature of surviving sources. Foster summarizes the major *literary* sources that are available (although, bear in mind that archaeological sources are important too).

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Foster, Benjamin R. “Major Sources.” In <i>Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature</i>, 8-10. Third edition. Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005.</p>
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A3. Dying-and-Rising gods and goddesses: Dumuzi and Inanna, and Nature Religion

In 1890, James Frazer proposed that the concept of a “dying-and-rising” god can be found in a very wide range of religious systems. Dying-and-rising gods were so widespread, claimed Frazer, in *The Golden Bough*, because they were based on the universal experience of the death of vegetation in Winter and its subsequent rebirth each year in Spring, and this cycle of nature was the basis on which all these dying-and-rising gods were found in so many different cultures. Implicit in Frazer’s argument is that Christianity is hardly unique in presenting a dying and resurrecting god (Jesus). Yet since then, his proposal has been widely criticized by scholars, who point out that many or most of his examples do not really involve a god that dies or revives or at least not both. The ‘dying-and-rising god’ is not nearly as common as Frazer made out. Nevertheless, when it comes to the gods of Mesopotamia, the Levant, and Egypt, we find here the strongest claim for “dying-and-rising” gods. Two examples, discussed in your reading by Thorkild Jacobsen include Dumuzi and Inanna (Egypt), to which we may add Ba‘al (the Levant) and Osiris (Egypt). In the case of Mesopotamia and Egypt at least, the dying-and-rising gods are also closely connected to the cycle of nature or vegetation.

RELS 303 ONLY:



Mettinger, Tryggve N.D. “The ‘Dying and Rising God’: A Survey of Research from Frazer to the Present Day.” In *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J.J.M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts, 373-86. Winona Lake: Eisenbauns, 2004.

Frazer’s contention is linked to another veritable claim in the comparative study of religion: that the earliest form of religion was “animism”: the attribution of human-like intentions and personalities to other, non-human parts of nature. Animists believe that even inanimate objects such as rocks or plants such as trees have their own rock-like or tree-like thoughts, intentions, and feelings, either in themselves or due to their ‘rock-spirit’ or ‘tree-spirit’. For E.B. Tylor (*Primitive Culture*, 1871), early humans understood all natural events, such as the rising of the sun or rebirth of crops in the Spring, as involving a person (god or powerful being) behind the natural phenomenon who wills these things to happen. Subsequent scholars have criticized the tendency of Tylor to reduce animism to a type of ‘bad science’ or poor explanation of the world—one that science has subsequently corrected. Tylor has also been criticised for his unsubstantiated claim that all cultures were originally animists. Yet recently, studies have affirmed a high level of correlation between hunter-gatherer societies and animist belief.

Your reading from Thorkild Jacobsen involves a classic defence of “dying-and-rising” god explanation of the Mesopotamian myths of Damuzi and Inanna/Ishtar. These myths, he argues reveal their origin in the natural cycle of the death of vegetation followed by the renewed fertility of Spring. Indeed, Jacobsen provides a very good argument for the centrality of the natural cycle to these stories of Damuzi and Inanna. One might question, however, his claim that this dimension to Mesopotamian gods could be so precisely dated to the “fourth millennium”, or that the explanation of the Mesopotamian gods as forces of nature was ever once independent of a hierarchical and therefore political view of Damuzi and Inanna.

Now read:



Jacobsen, Thorkild. “Fourth Millennium Metaphors. The Gods as Providers: Dying Gods of Fertility.” In *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, 23-27, 47-52, 55-73, 246-47. New Haven: Yale, 1976.


Stephanie Dalley, editor and translator. “The Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld.” In *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others.*, 155-62. Revised edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

A4. Enuma Elish: The Rise of Marduk (and Babylon)

The previous topic examined the highly disputed subject of the early influence of the forces of nature on the Mesopotamian conception of their gods and goddesses. What seems more clear is that their conception was also influenced by human politics: the structure of Mesopotamian society, and in particular the institution of kingship.

The importance of human politics on the evolution of Mesopotamian gods is perhaps clearest in the famed ‘creation’ account first discovered in Ninevah, Assyria: *Enuma Elish*. (Note: sometimes the title of this work is spelt *Enūma eliš*, the š—an ‘s’ with a wedge-shaped caron above it—is pronounced “sh”.) The theme of creation in *Enuma Elish* is, however, not mentioned until Tablet IV; instead, the focus is on ‘theogony’: a narrative that describes the generation of the gods, in this case from the first and original god Anu. Moreover, when *Enuma Elish* comes around to describing the creation of the universe and all that exists within it, these creations are attributed to Marduk, the patron god of Babylon. If you look back to the family tree of the gods in your reading from Foster (2007:166), you will see that Marduk is only the grandchild of Anu, so born two generations after him, and seemingly of less importance in the hierarchy of gods. But in *Enuma Elish* he has become the pre-eminent god. The role of Marduk was reinforced by the recitation of *Enuma Elish* in the major annual festival in Babylon, the New Year’s festival (*Akitu*).

Tablet I of *Enuma Elish* describes the theogony as follows. First, all that existed were only the primeval powers or ‘old gods’: Apsu (the primeval waters believed to surround the earth) and his consort Tiamat (the Sea), who then generated the male and female pair Lahmu and Lahamu (the constellations of stars), who in turn generated Anshar and Kishar (Sky Father and Earth Mother), who then generated the first of the new gods, Anu. Anu then gives birth to “Nudimmud”, another name for Ea/Enki. Tablet I of *Enuma Elish* continues by narrating a conflict between the old gods (governed by Apsu) and the new gods (led initially by Ea/Enki, but later with Marduk rising to the position of champion and ruler of the gods).

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Lambert, W.G. “Enuma Elish Tablet 1.” In <i>Babylonian Creation Myths</i>, 51-59. Mesopotamian Civilizations 16. Winona Lake: Eisenbauns, 2013.</p>
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Andrea Seri summarises the remainder of the story contained in *Enuma Elish*. She focuses on the different ways that Marduk is presented as appropriating the pre-eminent role within the pantheon of gods. The text thus combines epic battles, theogony, the creation of the universe, and an etiology (origin account) of the rise to supremacy of Babylon and its patron god Marduk.

Now read:



Seri, Andrea. “The Role of Creation in Enūma eliš.” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 12 (2012): 4–29.

A5. Gilgamesh and Kingship: Divine or human?

We saw how the Mesopotamian construction of the pantheon of the gods, in particular the role of Marduk, was to a large extent based on the human institution of kingship. But the opposite direction of influence is also the case: the notion of kingship was influenced by Mesopotamian ideas about the gods. The legitimacy of Mesopotamian kings was dependent on their imagined role as privileged intermediaries on earth between the gods and other people. The king was integral to the daily rituals and offerings carried out for the gods. He was the “vice-regent” of the gods on earth, ruling on behalf of the gods. In some respects also, the king could also be counted among the gods.

Your reading from Louise M. Pryke discusses how the narrative progression in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* reinforces the characteristics of the ideal king. At the beginning of the story, Gilgamesh is very much not an ideal king: he is tyrannical and irresponsibly abandons his duties to embark on heroic adventures. Yet, complicating matters, these heroic epics were written to extol the kingly qualities of later Mesopotamian kings, by glamorizing their illustrious ancestors. With the help of his close friend Enkidu, Gilgamesh learns the proper way to act as king of Uruk, that is, according to the Mesopotamian ideals of kingship.

Now read:



Pryke, Louise M. *Gilgamesh: Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World*, 8-12. London: Routledge, 2019.

Today many people might consider it the height of hubris for a human to claim that they are a god or goddess. But this is to impose a strict dichotomy between gods and humans, in contrast to the arguably more fluid distinction between gods and humans that prevailed within Mesopotamia culture. Depending on the context, the same king can call himself, on the one hand, a servant of the gods or, on the other hand, the very “flesh of the gods” (*Ludlul I*) or the very “Sun of his land” (as per an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar I). If we understand divinity not in terms of an absolute or qualitative difference to humans, but as a difference in the *amount of power* that deities hold, then we can easily understand why—compared with his ordinary subjects—the powerful Mesopotamian king was in certain respects acclaimed as a ‘god’.

RELS 303 ONLY:



Jones, Philip. "Divine and Non-Divine Kingship." In *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*, ed. Daniel C. Snell, 330-42. Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World. Malden: Blackwell, 2005.

Now read:




Pryke, Louise M. "Kingship." In *Gilgamesh: Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World*, 37-66. London: Routledge, 2019.


A6. Gilgamesh and Death: An undifferentiated afterlife?

As we shall see later on in this course, the Egyptian view of the afterlife was overall very positive for Egyptians: the afterlife was available to all, it involved the prospect of a blessed or happy state of existence in a paradisiacal land, and life after death offered intimate contact with the gods. By contrast, the Mesopotamian view of life after death has often been characterized as pessimistic, involving a gloomy existence underground, miserable conditions, and estrangement from the gods. Much of this characterization was driven by early Bible scholarship, which reached very similar conclusions regarding the dominant early Jewish view of the afterlife, up until ca. 300-200 BC when Judaism developed the idea of a heavenly existence for the righteous dead.

On the one hand, there is some truth in this contrast between Mesopotamia and Egypt. The story of *Adapa* contrasts the immortality which is available to the gods with the "downtrodden" mortal life expected even by the most wise of all humans, the story's chief protagonist Adapa. Similarly, a central theme of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is immortality. Overcome with unparalleled grief at the death of his best friend and companion Enkidu, Gilgamesh sets off, as told in the final tablets of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, on a quest to attain immortality. Although ultimately unsuccessful, he learns to be content with this present life. An 'appendix' to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* contained in Tablet 12 describes Gilgamesh's further interactions with the Underworld, an existence described as predominantly gloomy and melancholic.


On the other hand, various other Mesopotamian literary texts envisage the Underworld as a vast city of the dead, with plenty to eat and drink. In *Ereshkigal and Nergal*, the dead live in a city presided over by the queen and king of the Underworld, Ereshkigal and Nergal. Theirs is a dark and dismal royal court, separated from the other gods, but the city's careful organization offers a degree of hope and sustenance for its residents. In this and other texts, there is a more positive view of afterlife existence than the conception found, for example, in *Epic of Gilgamesh* Tablet XII of an utterly gloomy and miserable afterlife existence. (Note that, in your reading by Gregory Shushan, he refers to Gilgamesh using the Sumerian spelling "Bilgames" when he discusses the early Sumerian poems about Gilgamesh.)

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Shushan, Gregory. "Sumerian and Old Babylonian Mesopotamia." <i>Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations: Universalism, Constructivism, and Near-Death Experience</i>, 70-89. London: Continuum, 2009.</p>
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<p>RELS 303 ONLY:</p> 	<p>Abusch, Tzvi. "Mourning the Death of a Friend: Some Assyriological Notes." In <i>Gilgamesh: A Reader</i>, ed. John Maier, 109-21. Wauconda, IL: Olchazy-Carducci, 1997.</p>
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The wholly pessimistic appraisal of the Mesopotamian afterlife in some texts also conflicts with the mortuary practices of Mesopotamians. The term 'mortuary' refers to activities carried out in relation to the dead. The dead were provided for with food and drink in monthly *kešpu* offerings given by their living descendants at their tombs. Scholars refer to such offerings as mortuary cults. The term 'cult' refers to veneration or remembrance such as feeding the deceased with offerings. (The use of the term 'cult' in Religious Studies to refer to worship or veneration should not be confused with its popularized meaning as a new or alternative religious movement.) An alternative name for the mortuary cult is the 'cult of the dead'. The mortuary cult is sometimes also referred to as a 'funerary cult', although 'funerary' strictly only refers to cultic ritual carried out during a funeral, that is, soon after death, not ongoing rituals involving the dead.

As your reading by Caitlin E. Barrett argues, Mesopotamian grave goods and other features of tombs tell a different story to many of the Mesopotamian literary texts. Her article illustrates some of the limitations we face in attempting to reconstruct ancient religion; given the piecemeal nature of the surviving sources, there are many gaps in our knowledge. The different conclusions reached from different types of evidence may be difficult if not impossible to resolve, given our present state of knowledge.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Barrett, Caitlín E. "Was Dust Their Food and Clay Their Bread? Grave Goods, The Mesopotamian Afterlife, and the Liminal Role of Inana/Ishtar." <i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i> 7, no. 1 (2007), 7-19.</p>
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A7. Maintaining the Great Gods: Temple and sacrifice

Mesopotamian mythology indicates that the gods had a generally negative view of humans. The gods created humanity as an afterthought, and only as a tool to relieve the gods of their toil, and regarded us mainly as a bit of a nuisance. Yet, the Temple system was based on the supposition that the gods could generally be relied upon to display their benevolence to humans. If the gods received their due sacrifices and offerings, they provided benefits in return: good crops, good health, successful business transactions, protection from enemies, etc. A fed god is, evidently, a happy god.

The temple in Mesopotamia and the rest of the Ancient Near East was a god's home or residence on Earth. In fact, the Akkadian word for Temple, *bitu*, is the same word used for a person's house. This is the same case for the Hebrew cognate *bayit*, also used equally of God's house and a Jewish person's house. And just like a person's house, each Mesopotamian temple was the place where a deity lived, in the form of their cult statue, which was believed to embody the actual presence of the god or goddess in their house (temple). The cultic statue housed in his or her temple was not a mere symbol of the god or goddess, but *was* the god or goddess, who both fully manifested themselves in the statue and yet also maintained their ultimate residence in heaven or elsewhere in the cosmos. The cult statue usually lived in an inner sanctuary of the temple, the so-called 'Holy of Holies'. It was even washed and dressed at the start of each day, like an ordinary person, provided twice daily with food offerings on dishes accompanied by utensils in order to be sustained, and also provided with music and incense to make sure they were happy. During religious festivals, the deity would visit another god in the other god's temple, and be carried by a grand procession through the city, with residents of the city thronging the streets to catch a glimpse of their god or goddess.


A famous type of Mesopotamian building, often but not always built in the vicinity of the temple, was the ziggurat. Unfortunately, as the ziggurats were built from mud-bricks, unlike the Egyptian pyramids (constructed from stone), they have not survived intact; but some bases are still standing and facades have been reconstructed from their remains. The ziggurat was a pyramid-like structure, but unlike the Egyptian pyramids was not constructed to cover an internal tomb. Its function was external to the structure, in its series of stairways and ramps leading up to the top level: the *shaburu*, or top level of the ziggurat, which contained a bed and table for the god or goddess to enjoy after their long journey down from heaven. The *shaburu* was an earthly junction or rest-stop between the god's heavenly residence and his earthly residence. The "Tower of Babel" in the Bible (Genesis 11.1-9) describes what is probably a ziggurat in what it calls "the land of Shinar" (Babylonia), so plausibly the ziggurat Etemenanki in Babylon. But unlike its description in the Bible, the Mesopotamian ziggurat was not a means for humans to climb up to the heavens, nor was it a place for rituals to be carried out (as in the temples). It was a place for the gods to come down from heaven, maybe on their way to their local earthly temple.

Daily blood sacrifices and offerings of crops and liquids were central to the operation of the Mesopotamian temple complex. The king was ultimately responsible for ensuring the ongoing provision of sacrifice and offerings to the gods, but the day-to-day administration was handed over to the priests. There was a difference in role occupied by the Babylonian king, who was not qualified to act as a priest, and the Assyrian king, who was initiated to the priesthood and took part in the sacrifices, offerings, and libations (pouring of liquids).

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Schneider, Tammi J. “The Temples”; “Religious Personnel”; “Ritual”. In <i>The Cambridge History of Religions in the Ancient World; Volume 1: From the Bronze Age to the Hellenistic Age</i>, ed. Michele Renee Salzman, 74-78. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.</p> <p>Hundley, Michael B. “Mesopotamian Temples.” In <i>Gods in dwellings: Temples and divine presence in the ancient Near East</i>, 49-72. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature 2013.</p>
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A8. Spells, Incantations, and Witchcraft

Older scholarship drew a sharp contrast between the religious practices of the ordinary populace and those of the elite in particular the royal family. A hard-and-fast boundary has often been drawn between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ religion, or ‘popular’ and ‘institutional’ religion. The category of ‘popular’ religion, referring to the religion practised by the majority of Mesopotamians as opposed to the elite, is however not something utterly distinct from elite religion. The household did express a special devotion within the household to “one’s [own] god” (*ilum*), which was believed to bless their devotee and protect them from harm. But practices such as exorcism, healing, spells and protections against evil powers (all sometimes associated with ‘popular’ religion) were employed by king and commoner alike.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Leick, Gwendolyn. “Private Devotion and Personal Gods.” In <i>The Babylonians: An Introduction</i>, 113-20, 163-64. New York: Routledge, 2003.</p>
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In Mesopotamia, magic was believed to be efficacious for attracting good fortune or alleviating misfortune. Magic is a contested term in religious studies: it is often used popularly as a negative or pejorative term, in order to criticize religious practices that are not liked or approved of. Thus the boundary between magic and other religious practices is a grey area. One person’s profound religious ritual is another person’s ‘magic’. But here we will use the term to refer to symbolic gestures or recitations, which are reliant upon secret knowledge, and which manipulate what are believed to be opaque connections between words/objects and target objects or persons, in order to effect changes in those target objects or persons via those connections. To break this down, what we are referring to as “magic” firstly requires rituals or spoken words, including spells and incantations that are sometimes accompanied by various actions. Secondly, the practitioner of magic will have privileged access to knowledge of these rituals or words, usually as a result of training by another knowledgeable practitioner. Thirdly, it is imagined that there is a “sympathetic” connection between the rituals/words and the target object or person; the term “sympathetic” refers to the different ways that there is imagined to be a correspondence between certain words

(i.e., incantations) or things (e.g., voodoo dolls) and other things or persons in reality. Lastly, it is believed that the target objects or persons may be sympathetically affected by manipulating those connected objects or by reciting the right words.

In Mesopotamia, magic was carried out by expert ‘magicians’, such as the *āšipu* and the *mašmaššu* (types of “exorcist”), the *asû* (“physician”), and other more specialist experts such as the *mušlabbu* (“snakecharmer”). To some extent, these categories of Mesopotamian “magic” overlap with what we would term medicine or science. That is, some of the sympathetic connections—e.g., between consuming a particular herb and being cured of disease—are proved real connections by modern medicine and science. Mesopotamian magic was sometimes performed in order to obtain something that was considered lacking, such as wealth, property, or even love, as in the case of the “Love Charm” in your readings. But most Mesopotamian magic was ‘defensive’, dispelling evil or providing protection. For example, it was believed that demons could slip into one’s house through its various openings to cause trouble. The demon Lamashtu, in particular, required the making and subsequent ritual destruction of figurines representing Lamashtu. These procedures were believed to prevent Lamashtu’s evil, by this sympathetic means, stopping her in particular from attacking women during childbirth or stealing the souls of infants—as she was, apparently, wont to do.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Foster, Benjamin R. “(c) Love Charm” (66-67); “II.21 Against Lamashtu” (173-74). In <i>Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature</i>. 3rd edition; Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005.</p>
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Your reading from Tzvi Abusch provides an introduction to *Maqlû*: a series of incantations or spells, together with descriptions of rituals to be performed while reciting those incantations during an accompanying overnight ceremony. The purpose of *Maqlû* is to negate the effects of malevolent magic, which was often believed to be the case where one suffered from some misfortune (including ill health, crop failure, even sexual problems). Abusch demonstrated that *Maqlû* was not a random collection of incantations and rituals, but a united sequence to be performed over the course of a single night. The ceremony was performed in the month of Abu (July/August), which was when the gate to the Netherworld was believed to be most fully open to disgruntled deceased spirits and malevolent demons.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Abusch, Tzvi. “Introduction.” In <i>The Witchcraft Series Maqlû</i>, 1-16. Atlanta: SBL Press 2015.</p>
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A9. Good Omens: Divine messages in livers

There are and were a lot of benefits in knowing what the future has in store. Knowledge of the future provides a person with security against future surprises as well as a strategic advantage against contemporaries without such knowledge. It is no wonder, then, that Mesopotamians were very interested in discovering the future, and sought to do so via a group of practices that come under the category that scholars term ‘divination’.

Two types of divination were practised in Mesopotamia: unsolicited and solicited. Unsolicited omens could be observed in nature. Nature’s patterns were observed and then interpreted according to various divinatory rules (which often took the basic form of ‘if you see x, then this means y’). The most popular type of unsolicited omens were observed in the sky and celestial realm, and interpreted according to the rules of astrology (e.g., the pattern of the stars, planets, comets, sun, and moon, including eclipses). Other forms of unsolicited omens included augury (observation and interpretation of the patterns in the flights of birds), teratology (establishing the meaning of malformed births in animals), oneiromancy (dream interpretation), and menology (a system of lucky and unlucky days on which one may undertake an event, such as a journey or harvesting). The interpretation of aspects of the natural world depended on often quite complex sets of rules, recorded in vast ‘omen’ collections such as ‘dream books’ for dream interpretation or the collection of 7000-odd astrological interpretations contained in the 70 large tablets comprising the Neo-Assyrian work entitled *Enuma Anu Enlil*.

Solicited omens required some activity on behalf of the diviner before observations were carried out. Types of solicited omens included lecomancy (interpreting the patterns of water dropped on oil); libanomancy (interpreting the patterns of smoke emitted from an censer); cledomancy (interpreting the patterns of arrows shot into the air); and extispicy (interpreting the patterns on animal parts and entrails, in particular the liver; ‘hepatoscopy’ is the precise term used to describe extispicy regarding the liver, which Mesopotamians considered the most important part of extispicy). Each of these solicited forms of divination relied upon a storehouse of acquired knowledge, transmitted for example on clay models of livers or in catalogues of technical terms. These signs were believed to be written in nature by the gods, who (as gods) knew what the future held, knowledge which therefore the wise could access and interpret. Every sector of Mesopotamian society employed diviners, from the king down to a peasant.

Your reading from Stefan M. Maul sets out the procedures for an extispicy: the reading of divine messages in animal parts and entrails, and in particular in the liver (the part of an animal’s body that the gods especially favoured in communicating messages to humans).

Now read:



Stefan M. Maul. “Message in Livers and Entrails: Extispicy’s Essentials.” In *The art of divination in the ancient Near East: Reading the signs of heaven and earth*, 44-77. Translated by Brian McNeil and Alexander Johannes Edmonds. Waco: Baylor University Press 2018.

B. The Levant

B1. The Levant and the Baal Cycle

The Levant is the second of the three regions we will cover in our examination of ancient religion. The Levant (sometimes also referred to as Syria-Palestine) was an area encompassing Syria and Aram-Damascus in the north, Palestine in the south (Israel/Samaria in northern Palestine, Judea in southern Palestine), Lebanon-Phoenicia and Philistia on the western coast (on the Mediterranean Sea), and Ammon, Moab and Edom to the east of the Jordan River (i.e., in the ‘Transjordan’). As with the study of all ancient cultures, the historical evidence for this region is piecemeal and uneven. This fact means that we are reliant for our understanding of ancient Levantine religion on just a few sites and texts, from a restricted number of time periods. As a result, much remains uncertain.




Some useful archaeological finds include the written tablets from Ebla (modern Tell Mardikh, Syria) dating to the late third millennium BC; and the cache of letters between Egypt and Levantine kings from Akhetaten (modern Tell el-Amarna, Egypt), known as the Amarna letters, dating to the 1350s-1330s BC. But the most important historical evidence for our understanding of ancient Levantine religion is found at the site of Ugarit in northern Syria. Also helpful for reconstructing the culture and history of the region are various sites in Palestine (Israel-Judea), and older traditions preserved within the pages of the Jewish Bible (the ‘Old Testament’ or ‘Hebrew Bible’).



Discovered in 1927, Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra, northern Syria) was a late second-millennium city-kingdom destroyed in ca. 1180 BC. As a result of its sudden destruction, many clay tablets, written in cuneiform, were preserved—often baked hard by the fires of the city’s destruction. Most of these clay tablets record the everyday administration and business of Ugarit. But some preserve stories about the gods and goddesses who were previously known only from the Bible’s depiction of ‘Canaanite’ deities. (The term ‘Canaanite’ refers to the people whom the Bible claims lived in Israel and Judea before the Israelites and Judeans.) Although Ugaritians in Syria cannot be equated with the ‘Canaanites’ of pre-Israelite Palestine, they provide the best

available near-contemporary evidence for reconstructing Canaanite religion. But the Ugaritic religion should first be understood on its own terms. For each of the peoples in the Levant (e.g., Ugaritians, Israelites, Edomites, Phoenicians) have their own particular ‘twist’ on Levantine religion.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Schniedewind, William M. and Joel H. Hunt. <i>A Primer on Ugaritic: Language, Culture, and Literature</i>, 5-11. New York: Cambridge University Press 2007.</p>
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By contrast with Ugarit, the people known as Israelites emerged in the Palestinian hill country to the south of Syria probably only shortly before the destruction of Ugarit. The Merneptah Stele (1213-1204 BC) is the first extant record of Israelites living in the region, mentioning them alongside neighbouring peoples such as the Canaanites in Gaza and the residents of various other Philistine cities. The people who became known as Judeans (i.e., Jews) settled the southern Palestinian hill country at an even later time. Archaeological surveys of what became Judea have observed an increase in settlement numbers only from the ninth century BC (i.e., 900-801 BCE). Many of the Bible’s stories about the origins of Israelites and Judeans are therefore no longer considered to hold much of historical value.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Davies, Philip. “A History of Ancient Israel.” <i>The Bible for the Curious: A Brief Encounter</i>, 54-55. Equinox, 2018.</p> <p>“Abbreviations.” In <i>The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments: New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition</i>, v. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993.</p> <p>Berlejung, Angelika. “History and Religion of ‘Israel’: Basic Information.” Translated by Thomas Riplinger. In <i>T&T Clark Handbook of the Old Testament</i>, ed. Jan Christian Gertz et al, 70-71. London: T&T Clark, 2012.</p> <p>Curtis, Adrian, ed. “The Kingdom of Judah.” In <i>Oxford Bible Atlas</i>, 124. Fourth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.</p>
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Most of the Bible’s stories which have their setting before ca. 900 BCE are better understood as foundation stories, but not containing more than a little historical material. Among the foundation stories contained in the Bible are the stories or legends of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs (e.g., Abraham and Sarah) that the Bible dates to the early second millennium BC; the enslavement in

and escape from Egypt in the ‘exodus’ and the conquest of the ‘Canaanites’ dated to the mid-second millennium BC; the rule of Israel by a succession of ‘judges’ until the early Iron Age; and an extensive united monarchy under Saul, David, and Solomon around 1000 BC. Although, all of these stories may well contain vestiges of actual events, albeit distorted over time, they contain little of historical value. The early history of Israel and Judea commences in the Iron Age (beginning ca. 1200 BC). The composition of the books which make up the Bible should be attributed to an even later time; the majority of the Bible was written in the Persian Period (539-330 BC).

After the destruction of the kingdom of Israel (‘Samaria’) in the northern hill country by the Assyrians (ca. 722 BC), the southern kingdom of Judea and its capital Jerusalem became the dominant power in the area that had not been absorbed into the Assyrian Empire. In the Bible, Judea even claims the name ‘Israel’ for itself; the northern kingdom of Israel becomes known primarily as ‘Samaria’ and becomes a mere Assyrian province. Judea was invaded and devastated by the Babylonians in 587 BC. But Judea became prosperous again from the mid-to-late Persian Period, albeit controlled by a succession of empires for most of those centuries (Babylonian, Persian, Greek/Hellenistic, Roman). Judea lasted as a nation until its eventual destruction in AD 70. The Romans eventually exiled all Jews from Judea in AD 136.

<p>RELS 303 ONLY:</p> 	<p>Kratz, Reinhard G. <i>Historical and Biblical Israel: The History, Tradition, and Archives of Israel and Judah</i>, 14-31. Translated by Paul Michael Kurtz. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.</p>
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In this course, however, we are more interested in coming at the Bible from the back end, so to speak. Although the Jewish Bible is a relatively late (largely Persian-Period) composition, it preserves a number of earlier religious traditions, many of which provide invaluable evidence concerning the beliefs and practice of early Israelite religion, that is, before its turn to monotheism from about the sixth-century BC. So we are going to use the Bible to get at the vestiges of these earlier traditions. It is a somewhat risky enterprise, because we don’t know to what extent these traditions were altered by later writers. Yet at the same time, the hints of earlier forms of Israelite (and Canaanite) religion within the pages of the Bible are simply too enticing to ignore.

Early discoverers of the Ugaritic clay tablets were amazed to find references to many of the gods already known from the Jewish Bible—gods whose worship the Jewish biblical authors attribute to their rivals, the ‘Canaanites’. Ugarit’s major gods include the high god El (‘Ilu) and his wife and the mother of the other gods, the fertility goddess Athirat/Asherah; the storm and fertility god Ba’al (or Ba’lu; also named Haddad) and his sister-wife the war goddess Anat; the sun goddess Shapshu (or Shapash); the god of death Mot; the sea god Yamm; and the divine craftsman, who has a dual name, Kothar-wa-Hasis. Casting doubt on the Jewish attribution of these gods to non-Israelites, the divine name “El” is one of the names used in the Bible for the Israelite god himself. Yet ‘El’ is usually simply translated “God” in English-language bibles and so it is often not noticed that this is the name of what was originally a ‘Canaanite’ god.

Now read:



Coogan, Michael D. and Mark S. Smith. “The Gods and Goddesses of Ugarit.” In *Stories from Ancient Canaan*, 5-8. 2nd edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012.

Rahmouni, Aicha. “Religion at Ugarit.” *Religion Compass* 2/1 (2008): 18-25.

The longest of the narratives about the gods and goddesses found at Ugarit is usually given the modern name *The Ba'al Cycle* or *Ba'al Epic*. It tells the story of Ba'al's rise to the status of pre-eminent (most active and powerful, although *not* the principal or top) god in Ugaritian religion. Although El remains head of the pantheon, and must be consulted by the other gods for major decisions and arbitration, he functions very much in the background. The active and often aggressive divine leadership role is attributed to Ba'al, aided especially however by the goddess Anat, his sister-wife. *The Ba'al Cycle* is structured in three main parts, each being of similar length. Of the total of six tablets in *The Ba'al Cycle*, the first two narrate Ba'al's battle against Yamm (Sea) and the forces of chaos; the next two tablets narrate the story of Ba'al's acquisition of a palace, in recognition of his divine pre-eminence; and the final two tablets narrate Ba'al's death and resurrection in his battle against the god of death, Mot (Death). A translation of the climactic scenes from Ba'al's battle against Yamm, from the second tablet, is included in your reading from Simon B. Parker (translation by Mark S. Smith).

Approximately only half of the *The Ba'al Cycle* survives on its six tablets, and this is one of the reasons that interpretations of its content vary between interpreters. In addition, the work has been subject to various academic trends of interpretation over the century since its discovery. As discussed in the readings, some of these trends have lost academic favour, due to criticisms of their lack of supporting evidence. Most interpreters would agree, however, that a central concern of *The Ba'al Cycle* is to elevate the god Ba'al in the Ugaritian pantheon. His elevation therefore reminds us of the elevation of Marduk at Babylon, where Babylon's divine city patron usurps the more passive earlier head of the pantheon Enlil—as Ba'al does to some extent in respect of El.

Now read:



Gibson, John C.L. “The Ugaritic Literary Texts.” In *Handbook for Ugaritic Studies*, ed. W.G.E. Watson and N. Wyatt, 193-99. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

RELS 303 ONLY:



Parker, Simon B. "The Baal Cycle." Translation of the Ugaritic text by Mark S. Smith. In *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, 81-86, 102-9. SBL Writings from the Ancient World Series. Scholars Press: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997.


B2. From Canaanite El and Baal to the God of Israel

During the second millennium, El was the principal god of the Ugaritic pantheon, even after the elevation of Ba'al to the position of pre-eminent active and powerful god. The god El appears to occupy a similar position in the Canaanite/Israelite pantheon. The very name IsraEl indicates that, during the foundation of the Israelite people in the second millennium BC, the name of their High god was named 'El'. The term 'Israel' (Hebrew *yisrael*) is a theophoric name; that is, it contains the name of the Israelite god. The term Isra-El most probably means something like "El rules" or "El fights [for the Israelites]".


By contrast, the confederation of tribes that became known as Judea (Hebrew: *Yebuda*) in a much later period, during the first millennium BC, adopted the theophoric term containing the divine name 'Yahû' (often pronounced 'Yahweh'). There is no evidence that Yahû was worshiped in Israel-Judea before the Iron Age. In fact, Yahû/Yahweh appears to have origins outside of Israel-Judah, in Edom or Midian.

(Note: as Jews only wrote the consonants in the name of their High god, which were Y-H-W-H, we can't be completely sure whether the pronunciation is Yahû or Yahweh. But the earliest evidence, from antiquity, supports the pronunciation Yahû. Unfortunately though, the pronunciation 'Yahweh' has been favoured for well over a century in the scholarly literature. So we have to be aware of both renditions.)

During the early first millennium, in Israel-Judea, Yahû appropriated many of the characteristics of the Levantine god El (including his name) for himself. So Yahû and El were no longer understood as two separate gods, but as two names for the same god. By this means, Yahû replaced El as the supreme god of Israel. In the first millennium BC, the same trend occurs, as Ephraim Stern points out, in Aramean Geshur in the Golan Heights (where Haddad, a form of Ba'al, was the High God), Phoenicia (Ba'al); the Philistine cities (Dagan and also Ba'al), Ammon (Milcom), Moab (Chemosh), and Edom (Qos). Levantine religion was united in terms of the design and function of its temples, cultic objects, and cultic terminology. But Levantine religion was diverse in terms of the particular High God worshiped in each location.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Stern, Ephraim. “The Phoenician Source of Palestinian Cults at the End of the Iron Age.” In <i>Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina; Proceedings of the Centennial Symposium W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and American Schools of Oriental Research Jerusalem, May 29–31, 2000</i>, ed. William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin, 309. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003.</p>
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Traces of the older belief in the Levantine god El are present in many features of the Israelite god Yahû/Yahweh as he is described in the Bible. As Wayne T. Pitard points out, the close relationship of El and Yahû is especially prominent in the narratives about Israel’s Patriarchs and Matriarchs (Genesis 12-50), that is, in the texts set in the early second millennium BC. The Israelite Yahû is even named ‘El Shaddai’ (probably ‘El of Mountains’).

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Coogan, Michael D. and Mark S. Smith. “Ugarit and Ancient Israel.” In <i>Stories from Ancient Canaan</i>, 13-18. 2nd edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012.</p> <p>Pitard, Wayne T. “The Ugaritic Mythological and Epic Texts: Their Impact on Biblical Studies.” In <i>Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations</i>, ed. Mark W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger, 255-63. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 341. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.</p> <p>Smith, Mark S. “El, Yahweh, and the Original God of IsraEL and the Exodus.” In <i>The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts</i>, 135-48. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.</p>
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By contrast, as Yahû/Yahweh was originally a southern (Edomite-Midianite-Kenite) storm god, he was a rival of Ba‘al. Like the storm god Ba‘al, Yahû/Yahweh received the epithet “Rider on the Clouds” (Psalm 68.4); Yahû, like the effects of a bad storm, causes the earth to quake, the heavens to shake, and the clouds to pour with water (Judges 5.4-5). Yahû’s similarity to Ba‘al is also evident in the Bible’s accounts of Yahû’s combat with the Sea or with sea-monsters, discussed in your reading by Pitard. Even the probable meaning of Yahû’s name is derived from his original identity as storm god: “He who blows” (so translated by Thomas Römer). Yahû/Yahweh’s original rival identity as a storm god plausibly explains why he did not assimilate the name Ba‘al, as he did El, but was instead portrayed as *opposing* the Syrian-Phoenician-Philistine storm god (see especially 1 Kings 18).

RELS 303 ONLY:



Day, John. "Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal Imagery." In *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 91-98, 107-27. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement series 265. Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.

B3. Introducing Mrs God: Asherah


We have already encountered the wife (or 'consort') of El at Ugarit, the goddess Athirat/Asherah. In addition, as Stern notes, either Athirat/Asherah or the goddess Astarte was named as the divine consort of the High god of *each* of the first-millennium nations of the southern Levant: Geshur, Phoenicia, Philistia, Ammon, Moab, and Edom... as well as Israel and Judea.

RELS 303 ONLY:




Stuckey, Johanna H. "The Great Goddesses of the Levant." *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 30 (2003): 127-57.

There are two main types of evidence that indicate Asherah was once considered the divine wife of the Israelite god. The first type of evidence is archaeological. In particular, inscriptions found at various sites in Israel and Judea from ca. 800 BC onwards mention 'Asherah' alongside the Israelite and Judean god Yahû. One of the most interesting of these inscriptions was found in the 1970s, written on the sherds of two large pithoi (storage jugs) at Kuntillet el-'Ajrud. One of the inscriptions is accompanied by drawings, some of which may depict Asherah and (less plausibly) Yahû/Yahweh. There is some debate as to whether the 'Asherah' had become known mainly as a cultic object used in the worship of Yahû, such as a sacred tree or column/pole, rather than the goddess that she is in other centres in the Levant. But even so, such implements invoke the blessing of the goddess Asherah, and so assume her existence. Asherah was invoked and worshiped in connection with the worship of Yahû/Yahweh, with Asherah poles or trees erected inside the very temples of Yahû/Yahweh. It is relevant that even these Asherah poles or trees are outlawed at a later stage in the development of Judean religion.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Dijkstra, Meindert. “I Have Blessed you by YHWH of Samaria and his Asherah: Texts with Religious Elements from the Soil Archive of Ancient Israel.” In <i>Only One God? Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah</i>, ed. Bob Becking et al, 26-33. The Biblical Seminar 77. London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.</p>
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The other main type of evidence for the worship of Asherah as ‘Mrs God’ in ancient Israel is textual. In the first place, the Ugaritic texts make it clear that Asherah was a genuine Levantine goddess, not merely a cultic object or to be equated with the goddess Astarte (as she was wrongly identified in pre-Ugaritic scholarship). Asherah was also identified as Qudšu at Ugarit, a term meaning “holiness” or “sanctuary”, and worshiped under that latter name as far away as Egypt (alongside the Semitic warrior god Resheph and the Egyptian god of reproduction, Min). Secondly, although some mentions of ‘asherah’ in the Bible refer to her sacred pole or tree, this is not the case for at least the biblical passages of Judges 3.7; 1 Kings 15.13; 18.19; 2 Kings 21.7; 23.4; and 2 Chron 15.16, where she is more clearly a goddess. In these biblical passages, either offerings or worship or images or cultic objects or functionaries are made or dedicated to Asherah, which indicates belief in a goddess rather than envisaging merely an object.

The worship of the goddess Asherah alongside Yahweh/Yahû became prohibited at a later time in Israel, at least by the time of the composition of the Jewish Bible (in the latter half of the first millennium BC). But even the Bible acknowledges that the Asherah pole or tree continued to be set up in the temple of Yahû until as late as the seventh century BC. Worship of the Jewish God was consistent with worship of Asherah before the advent of monotheism in Israelite religion.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Day, John. “Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and in Northwest Semitic Literature.” <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> 105 (1986): 385–408.</p>
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B4. Death in the Levant

The two most famous legends found at Ugarit, the *Tale of Aqhat* and the *Legend of King Keret*, each feature kings who must deal with the ever-present threat of death.

In the *Tale of Aqhat*, King Danel requests the gods for a son, and El responds by granting him his request. At the feast celebrating his son’s birth, the craftsman god Kothar-wa-Hasis gives


Danel's son Aqhat a great bow, which later makes Anat jealous. So Anat offers to grant Aqhat immortality if he gives her the bow. Aqhat refuses, and is eventually killed by the god Yatipan, summoned by Anat. But the bow breaks in the process. Although the end of the story is missing, in what is preserved, the story breaks off with the warrior Pughat going off to find Yatipan and presumably seeking revenge on behalf of Danel. The story contains a very negative view of death, despite counting Danel among the *Rapi'uma/rpum* or deified dead kings.

In the *Legend of King Keret*, all of Keret's seven wives and children die. Instructed by El to lay siege to the town of Udum and demand marriage to King Pubala's daughter, Keret does so and receives new sons and daughters. But breaking his vow to give El's wife Athirat a great bounty from his victory, he is struck with illness, although saved later by El. In this story too, death is something to be feared. Keret's and Danel's membership of the elite deified kings, the *Rapi'uma*, requires that they have royal offspring—who will provide for them in the afterlife.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Rahmouni, Aicha. "Religion at Ugarit." <i>Religion Compass</i> 2/1 (2008): 28-30.</p>
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Christopher B. Hays explains how errors in the early archaeological excavations of tombs at Ugarit led to the mistaken assumption of an extensive cult of the dead that operated in the city. Once corrected, some scholars (especially Wayne T. Pitard) then went to the other extreme, and became especially sceptical of the presence of any mortuary cult whatsoever in Ugarit. Yet Hays lists various reasons that indicate the presence of a mortuary cult involving ancestors at Ugarit—even if it was not as extensive as first imagined. Debate about the extent of a death cult at Ugarit has been ongoing.

A key element of the debate concerns the nature of the *Rapi'uma/rpum* mentioned in a number of the literary texts at Ugarit. In *The Ba'al Cycle* (KTU 1.6 vi 45-47), the *Ugaritic King List* (KTU 1.113), and the *Ugaritic Royal Funerary Text* (KTU 1.161/RS 34.126), living kings are divinized in death and take their place among the *Rapi'uma*. The latter text, discussed by Pierre Bordreuil, makes it clear that the *Rapi'uma* are divinized ancestors of the current ruling king. In the *Rapi'uma Texts* (KTU 1.20-22), the *Rapi'uma* are summoned from the Netherworld to dine with the living, probably with the king. The meal is termed a *marziḥu*, also known in the Jewish Bible by a cognate term (*marzeah*), and seems to have involved excessive drinking of alcohol in which the living invited the dead to their meal. In both Ugaritic and Hebrew cultures, the *marziḥu/marzeah* is frequently, although not necessarily, also linked to the cult of the dead. The divinized kings are believed to be present at the meal, communing with the living.


<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Hays, Christopher B. “Death and the Dead in Syria-Palestine outside Israel and Judah.” In <i>A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and Its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah</i>, 98-117. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015.</p> <p>Bordreuil, Pierre. “RS 34.126: The Rapa’uma/Rephaim.” In <i>Ugarit at Seventy-five</i>, ed. K. Lawson Younger, 89-94. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007.</p>
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B5. Why are there Giants in the Bible?

In this and the following lecture, we see one example of how religious ideas and practices were seldom fixed or static in antiquity, as they are sometimes imagined to be over the centuries or millennia. Rather, religious conceptions tended, then as now, to develop and mutate, often in surprising ways.


The question posed in this lecture is why the Bible contains stories about Giants. One well-known story of Giants in the Bible is that of David versus Goliath, in which the Israelite King fights and defeats a Philistine Giant (either three-metres or two-metres tall, depending on the manuscript of 1 Samuel 17). But there are a number of other Giants identified in the Bible, most of them encountered by the Israelites in their invasion and conquest of the land of Canaan—at least according to the biblical narratives.

One of the main Hebrew terms used to describe these Giants is *Rephaim*, a term obviously related to the Ugaritic *Rapi’uma*. The Bible describes these *Rephaim* as kings and elite men from ancient times (the time of the Israelite conquest), just like their royal and elite rank at Ugarit. They are also the original (autochthonous) inhabitants of the land in which Israel settles, as well as neighbouring lands of Edom, Moab, Bashan (Hauran), and Philistia. Giants also appear elsewhere in the Bible, not only in the narratives of the conquest of Canaan. Some poetic biblical texts describe the *Rephaim* as dead beings, especially kings, who now occupy the Underworld (Sheol). Like the giants of the conquest, the dead *Rephaim* also lived in the remote past; but unlike the conquest stories which are set in that remote past when the *Rephaim* were still alive, the *Rephaim* of the Underworld are now long dead. Yet when it describes them as Giants, the Jewish Bible only describes the living *Rephaim* of the conquest as Giants, never the dead *Rephaim* mentioned in the poetic books. This is a puzzle, give also that the Ugaritic *Rapi’uma* were never described as Giants. The description of *Rapi’uma/Rephaim* as Giants represents a development restricted to the Bible, and restricted within the Bible to its conquest narratives not in its poetic writings.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Smith, Mark S. “Rephaim.” In <i>The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary</i> V, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992): 674-76.</p> <p>Doak, Brian R. “Pre-Israelite Giants in the Land of Canaan” In <i>The Last of the Rephaim: Conquest and Cataclysm in the Heroic Ages of Ancient Israel</i>, 70-94. Ilex Foundation Series 7. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.</p>
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<p>RELS 303 ONLY:</p> 	<p>Wyatt, Nicolas. “KTU 1.20-1.22 The RPUM Texts.” In <i>Religious Texts from Ugarit</i>, 314-323. Second edition. The Biblical Seminar 53. London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.</p>
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So although knowledge of the Ugaritic *Rapi'uma* helps us understand the Bible's characterization of the elite, and kingly nature of the biblical *Rephaim*, we haven't quite worked out why the Bible describes the living *Rephaim* as Giants. One common explanation involves a very unusual biblical story, the short narrative of the *Nephilim* of Genesis 6.1-4. In this story, certain 'sons of the gods' (kings? demigods? angels?) have sex with some 'daughters of men' (human women), and this results in their offspring being famous 'mighty men' of ancient times, the *Nephilim* (a term probably meaning 'fallen heroes'). The *Nephilim* are only mentioned in one other place in the Bible, Numbers 13.33, in a story about the conquest of Canaan, where the Israelites encounter local *Nephilim* who are so tall that they make the Israelites look like grasshoppers by comparison. Numbers 13.33 connects these *Nephilim* to a group called the *Anakim*, which in turn the book of Deuteronomy connects to the (Giant) *Rephaim*.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Stark, Thom. “The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men.” In <i>The Human Faces of God. What Scripture Reveals When It Gets God Wrong (And Why Inerrancy Tries To Hide It)</i>, 77-78. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011.</p>
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Yet one problem with interpreting the *Nephilim* as 'demigods' (half-god, half-human) is that Genesis 6.1-4 never mentions their height. It describes the *Nephilim* as ancient heroes, and renowned warriors, but not as having extraordinary height. What we appear to have in this story is a common ancient Near Eastern motif of heroic princes or kings, who perform famous deeds, and have dalliances with women ('daughters of men'). But these heroes are rarely


described as possessing gigantic height (Gilgamesh is a notable exception of both a king *and* Giant). So we are still left with the question of why the Bible elsewhere describes the *Rephaim* and *Nephilim* as Giants.

The answer may instead lie with the fact that, in Greece, from about the 400s BC onwards, ancient heroic kings began to be described as having gigantic stature. The development is recorded as early as Thucydides and Plato, so around the time of the composition of the biblical books of Numbers and Deuteronomy in the fifth-fourth centuries BC. Much later Greek writers are aware of many descriptions of the gigantic stature of heroes, for example, Pausanias, *Hellados Periegesis* (“Description of Greece”, ca. AD 150) and Philostratus of Lemnos, *Heroikos* (“On Heroes”, ca. AD 230). The attribution of gigantic height to autochthonous heroic kings (*Rephaim*) in Numbers and Deuteronomy is likely part of this broader trend in attributing gigantic height to ancient heroes.

B6. The Origin of Archangels

As the previous topic set out, the Giants whom we encounter in the Bible constitute a novel development from earlier Ugaritic and Israelite traditions about the heroic royal dead or *Rapi’uma/Rephaim*. If turning royal ancestors into Giants is a surprising development, even more surprising is that the same traditions about *Rapi’uma/Rephaim* provide the basis for the Jewish development of the concept of ‘archangels’.


Archangels are a relatively late addition to Judaism, first appearing in Jewish literature around 200 BC. In the earliest Israelite and Jewish tradition, angels were simply God’s messengers, extensions of the Jewish God in his earthly visitations rather than independent beings. The literal translation of Hebrew *mal’akh* (‘angel’) is simply ‘messenger’. But from approximately 200 BC, some angels began to be named and individualized as distinct from God himself. The earliest angels who given distinct names are Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael. Together with Sarial, these four leading angels became identified as the four ‘archangels’ or supreme angels—heavenly beings superior to all other beings except God himself.


<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Van Henten, J.W. “Archangel.” In <i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, 81. Leiden: Brill, 1999.</p>
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I propose that the names and roles of these four archangels developed from earlier Jewish traditions about *Rephaim*, the heroic royal warriors. There is striking unity in the Jewish traditions about *Gibborim* or ‘mighty men’ in Genesis 6.1-4, the *Anakim* of Numbers 13-14, King Og (Deuteronomy 3), the *Nephilim* (Genesis 6.1-4 and Numbers 13.33), the *Rephaim*, as well as the Ugaritic *Rapi’uma*. All of these terms have the same basic meaning of “mighty ones”, and the figures are very similarly conceived as royal heroic warriors of legendary times. Older traditions have therefore been reused and repackaged to create the figure of the Archangel.

In addition, two Jewish texts (the *War Scroll* and *Tobit*), composed around the time archangels first developed in Jewish tradition, reveal that the concept of leading angels or Archangels was still in transition at this time. The Archangel Raphael, in the book of *Tobit*, in particular, is still a ‘halfway house’ between the earlier conception of the *Rephaim* as the heroic royal dead and their later conception as angelic heavenly warriors. *Tobit* presents an irregular picture of the Raphael, who is less the archangel of later Jewish tradition than a heroic aristocratic ancestor of the Tobit family, sent from the afterlife in the heavens. The *War Scroll* presents both *Gibborim* (the heroic, righteous dead) and angels as each joining together in the heavens to fight a cosmic battle, rather than simply equating the two beings. The heroic human dead and angels share much the same function and exalted status, although still remain two distinct groups in this second century BC text.

These religious developments are closely linked to political changes taking place in Judea at the same time. The elevation of human *Rephaim* into heavenly archangels occurred only after the political shift from a local Judean monarchy to Judea’s rule by remote yet powerful foreign empires. The political changes opened up a space for human intermediaries (administrators) on earth and so also for cosmic intermediaries between Jews and God in the imagined heavenly realms. This political shift was further accompanied by an economic shift in the mode of production in Judea, as the ancient mode under the rule of a local monarch was replaced by a tributary mode in which Judean wealth was extracted via taxes paid to the Persian or Greek empires. So we see how religious change, at least in part, maps political and economic changes.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Galbraith, Deane. “The Origin of Archangels: Ideological Mystification of Nobility.” In <i>Class Struggle in the New Testament</i>, ed. Robert J. Myles, 209-22. Sheffield: Equinox, 2019.</p>
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<p>RELS 303 ONLY:</p> 	<p>Galbraith, Deane. “The Origin of Archangels: Ideological Mystification of Nobility.” In <i>Class Struggle in the New Testament</i>, ed. Robert J. Myles, 223-40. Sheffield: Equinox, 2019.</p>
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C. Egypt

C1. From the Pyramids to the Pharaohs: a history of Egypt

Egypt—the land of pyramids, divine kings, animal-head gods, and mummies—first emerged as a unified state sometime in the late fourth millennium BC. By the end of the period known as Naqada II (named after a village by that name), in ca. 3200 BC, Egypt was beginning to develop a level of social stratification, which is evident in larger and more ornate burials for elite persons. At this time, Egypt also began building larger towns with walled settlements. In this ‘pre-dynastic’ period, Egypt was not yet united in any significant respect, and local rulers generally controlled their towns and surrounding districts rather than larger areas.

These towns and villages were built along the banks of the Nile, the sole source of fertility in an otherwise arid and desertous land. With a length of 6,700km, the Nile is the longest river in the world. The Nile flooded annually, in July-August (Summer), providing the surrounding land with the water and nutrients necessary for sowing wheat in September (Autumn), which matured in Winter, and was harvested before the hot weather which arrived in Spring. The annual inundation of the Nile determined whether Egypt thrived or starved, although large grain storehouses could be relied upon in less productive years.

Historians conventionally divide the history of ancient Egypt into a series of 30 royal ‘dynasties’: each dynasty comprising a sequence of kings, occasionally including queens, who were typically united either by shared kinship or the location of their principal royal residence. Dynasty 1 begins in ca. 3100 BC, founded plausibly by King Narmer, who is usually identified with ‘Menes’ in Manetho’s Hellenistic Egyptian history (written early 3rd century BC). Menes, or Narmer, is credited as being the first to unite the two main regions of Egypt: Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt.

Contrary perhaps to expectations, ‘Upper’ Egypt refers to southern Egypt and ‘Lower’ Egypt refers to northern Egypt. The designations ‘Upper’ and ‘Lower’ are based on the direction of the Nile, which runs from the south (including its major source, Lake Victoria in Uganda/Tanzania/Kenya) to the north where it divides into the Delta and empties into the Mediterranean Sea. The last of the 30 native Egyptian dynasties ended in 343 BC with the invasion of the Persians. This system of 30 dynasties was the innovation of the historian Manetho, and is still used today. Yet modern Egyptologists also divide ancient Egyptian history into three main ‘Kingdoms’ (Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom)—each representing periods during which the country was relatively stable and united—and in-between which are ‘Intermediate Periods’—when Egypt was more fragmented or ruled/threatened by foreign powers.

Now read:




Wente, Edward. "Chronological Table." In *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, viii-x. Writings from the Ancient World 1. Georgia: Scholars Press, 1990.



The Old Kingdom (Dynasties 3-6; ca. 2720-2200 BC) saw the construction of the great pyramids, beginning with the Step Pyramid of King Djoser (ca. 2705-2685 BC). The pyramids functioned as massive tombs, memorializing each king, and were regularly accompanied by mortuary temples in which offerings were made to the now divinized kings. On the walls of pyramids from the end of the 5th Dynasty (King Unas; ca. 2375-2345 BC) onwards, we find elaborate instructions and spells for the success of the king in his afterlife, which are known as the Pyramid Texts. The kings of the Old Kingdom ruled from Memphis (Lower Egypt, i.e., northern Egypt), and the royal burial grounds were situated nearby in Saqqara. The creator god Atum and the sun god Re were among the most important gods worshiped in Memphis during the Old Kingdom, although other gods were pre-eminent at other places in Egypt.

After the turmoil of the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2200-2050 BC), Egypt was reunited by King Nebhepetra Mentuhotep II (2055-2004 BC), in the Middle Kingdom renaissance (Dynasties 11-12, with the first half of the 13th Dynasty; ca. 2055-1650 BC). Dynasty 11 was centred in Thebes in Upper Egypt and Dynasty 12-13 in Lisht (Itjtawy), in the Faiyum, Lower Egypt. It is this period that saw a rise in importance of the cult of Osiris, god of the Netherworld, and preparations for the afterlife. In addition, texts similar to the royal Pyramid Texts are found in coffins of the non-royal population, also providing instructions and protective spells for the afterlife. The cult of Amun at Thebes grew in prominence from the Middle Kingdom onwards, and the first temples in the Karnak Temple Complex (in Thebes) also date to this period.


Following the expulsion of Levantine rulers who ruled Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period, the New Kingdom (Dynasties 18-20; ca. 1570-1070) marks the most expansive and prosperous period of ancient Egyptian history. The sun god Amun-Re, a combination of the creator god Amun and sun god Re, rose to unequalled pre-eminence in the pantheon, and was recognized as controlling every other god and goddess. For a brief period, Pharaoh Amenhotep IV (who changed his name to Akhenaten) introduced a form of monotheism, which concentrated worship on one god alone, the Aten (sun disc) and eliminated most other gods from worship. But even apart from the reign of Akhenaten, the sun god received unprecedented worship and pre-eminence in the New Kingdom. Kings of the New Kingdom (with the exception of Akhenaten) were buried on the other side of the Nile from Thebes/Karnak, in the ‘Valley of the Kings’. Here we find many examples of the ‘books of the dead’ which provide instruction for the deceased kings’ journey from this world to the afterlife.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Hart, George. “Introduction.” In <i>The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses</i>, 1-10. Second edition. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005.</p>
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The gods of Egypt were grouped by ‘families’, although these groups differ according to location. The most common grouping is found at Heliopolis, in Lower Egypt, the so-called ‘Ennead’ (or group of nine) gods under the leadership of Atum or Re-Atum. This Heliopolitan pantheon rose to prominence in the Old Kingdom. In the Heliopolitan account of the origin (‘theogony’) of the


Ennead, Atum generated Shu (Empty space) and Tefnut (Moisture), who in turn generated Geb (Earth) and Nut (Sky), who generated Osiris and Isis, Seth and Nephthys. Osiris and Isis double as gods and the first king and queen of Egypt. They are opposed by Seth, a chaotic, anti-civilizational god who is married to his sister Nephthys. Osiris and Isis generate their son Horus to complete the Ennead.

In Thebes, by contrast, the chief gods formed a triad which became more important from the Middle Kingdom: the creator god Amun (later combined with the sun god Re to form Amun-Re), his wife the world-mother Mut, and their son the moon-god Khonsu. Terence DuQuesne provides a handy summary of the major Egyptian gods, for you to keep track of who's who.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Pinch, Geraldine. "The Gods Themselves: Deities and Myth." In <i>Egyptian Myth: A Very Short Introduction</i>, 30-42. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.</p> <p>David, Rosalie. "The Pantheon of Gods." In <i>Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt</i>, 151-54. Revised edition. New York: Facts on File, 2003.</p> <p>DuQuesne, Terence. "Facing the Gods: Selected Guide." In <i>The Quest for Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt</i>, ed. Erik Hornung and Betsy M. Bryan, 214-20. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2002.</p>
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C2. The Gods of Egypt: Creation and Osiris

Egyptian myths are not compiled in a canon of official texts, like the modern scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Instead, it is more usual to find only parts of myths in inscriptions, tombs, or represented in statues and paintings. Nevertheless, there are a set of core myths which are most widely represented throughout ancient Egypt, summarised in your reading by Geraldine Pinch.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Pinch, Geraldine. "Core Myths." In <i>Egyptian Myth: A Very Short Introduction</i>, 10-11. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.</p>
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Some myths concern creation, and there are different versions of how the world was created to be found in Egypt. But the most prominent was the Heliopolis creation story of the generation of the Ennead, already summarised above. By contrast, Hermopolis, in Middle Egypt (between Upper


and Lower Egypt), preserved the creation story of the Ogdoad. Four pairs of primeval forces (representing hiddenness, formlessness/flood, darkness, and the abyss) were employed by the city's patron god Thoth to initiate the creative process. At Thebes, in Upper Egypt, the craftsman god Khnum, son of Amun and Mut, was said to create human beings on a potter's wheel. In the Memphite Theology (recorded on the Shabaka Stone, ca. 700 BC, but probably transmitting a much older, Old Kingdom creation story), the creator god Ptah creates Atum and the other gods simply by saying their names. Despite their differences, Glenn S. Holland also observes some recurring features in Egyptian creation stories.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Holland, Glenn S. "The Nature of Creation Stories"; "Egyptian Stories of Creation." In <i>Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East</i>, 31-36. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.</p> <p>Lichtheim, Miriam. "The Memphite Theology." In <i>Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings. Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms</i>, 51-57. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.</p>
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The myth of the death and resurrection of Osiris is one of the most important stories about the gods in ancient Egypt—at least judging from its popularity and prevalence. In addition to its exciting narrative details—involving the attacks by Seth on his brother Osiris, the work of Isis in assisting her husband Osiris, and the ensuing battles between Isis and Osiris' son Horus and his uncle Seth—the story is important because Egyptians wanted to imitate Osiris's journey to the Underworld and, like him, to attain to resurrection and a blessed afterlife. The parallel between Osiris and every subsequent person is clear in the most common pictorial representation of Osiris (as a mummy, like other deceased persons) and in the reference to the deceased from the Middle Kingdom onwards as the 'Osiris [Personal Name]'.

The story of Isis and Osiris is summarised in your reading by Rosalie David. The story is recorded in part in Egyptian sources, such as on the stele of Amenmose ("The Great Hymn to Osiris"; Louvre C286). But it receives its most complete version in later Greek sources, such as Plutarch's "Isis and Osiris". When you read Plutarch, bear in mind that he has 'Hellenized' some of the names of the Egyptian gods, identifying them with the equivalent or similar Greek gods. So Seth is named "Typhon" (a lawless Greek god who, like Seth, opposes the head god, in this case Zeus), Thoth is named "Hermes" (also a scribal god in Greek religion). In addition, Horus-the-child (Egyptian *Har-pa-khered*) is transliterated "Harpocrates", and the goddess of childbirth Taweret is transliterated "Thueris". No doubt other changes to the myth were made, so that we cannot be absolutely sure of what was included in the earlier Egyptian versions.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>David, Rosalie. “Osiris, the People’s God: The First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom, c.2181–1786 BCE.” In <i>Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt</i>, 156-62, 81-89, 382-83. London: Penguin, 2002.</p> <p>Plutarch, “Isis and Osiris” 13-19. In <i>Moralia, Volume V</i>, translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, 35-49. Loeb Classical Library 306. Princeton: Harvard University Press, 1936.</p>
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<p>RELS 303 ONLY:</p> 	<p>Smith, Mark. (2009) ‘Democratization of the Afterlife’ in J. Dieleman and W. Wendrich (eds), <i>UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. Los Angeles</i>. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/70g428wj</p>
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C3. The Gods of Egypt: Re the Sun God

Although Osiris was very important for Egyptians, concerned as they were about their fate in the Netherworld, religion in ancient Egypt became more and more centred on the sun god, in his various forms. The sun god Re (sometimes spelt ‘Ra’) became dominant from about the 4th Dynasty. At Heliopolis (Egyptian Iwnw), Re took over Atum’s role as generator of the Ennead (the nine gods), where he became known as Re-Atum: sun god and creator god combined.

According to the basic myth, the sun god travelled across the sky in a day-barque (a type of ship) during the day, before entering the underworld at dusk and travelling through it in his night-barque, to reappear the following day. In the Pyramid Texts, it was the expectation of the deceased kings, for whom these texts were written, to join with the sun god in his daily journey across the sky and also through the Netherworld.

The bare fact of the sun’s circuit through the sky was not of interest to Egyptians. Rather it is the myth’s significance that attracted interest. Cultic activities in the Temple were designed to sustain that circuit and so guarantee the benefits it offered. The sun appeared to die and be reborn every day, and Egyptians wanted to be part of this mysterious process, ‘to get in on’ the power of regeneration that the sun god apparently possessed. For this reason, the king had to act to guarantee that this ‘natural’ process would repeat, by officiating in the morning cult of the sun god. Nature itself could not simply be left to run its course, but required the active participation of humans for its continuance.

Now read:



David, Rosalie. “The Rise of the Sun-Cult: The Old Kingdom, c. 2686 – c. 2181 BCE.” In *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 90-96. London: Penguin, 2002.

In Thebes, where Amun was first identified as the paramount creator god, Re was combined with the Amun as Amun-Re in the New Kingdom. Re was the active and visible divine aspect of the hidden god Amun (the name ‘Amun’ means “Hidden One”). Re was combined with Horus of the Horizon (Harakhte, the god of the eastern or morning sky) at Heliopolis, to form Re-Harakhty, who represented the noonday sun. Re was further combined with Khepri as Khepri-Re, the morning sun. In addition, Re-Herakhty was combined with Amun as Amun-Re-Herakhty.

The New Kingdom also witnessed an outpouring of hundreds of new hymns to the sun god, who was now recognized as the primary power behind the activity of all other gods and addresses. It was an inclusive rather than exclusive monotheism, however: the other gods continued to exist and participate with the sun god in his daily circuit, albeit as subservient gods. In what Jan Assmann terms the “New Kingdom Solar Theology”, the sun now occupied a realm above both humans and other gods, bestowing life on the other parts of the world. Even the god of the netherworld, Osiris was increasingly viewed as the nocturnal aspect of the sun god. This way of thinking paved the way to the later exclusive monotheism of Pharaoh Akhenaten, a revolution which was nonetheless short-lived in ancient Egyptian religion.

Now read:



Lichtheim, Miriam. “Two Hymns to the Sun god.” In *The Context of Scriptures, Volume 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. William H. Hallo, 43-44. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Assmann, Jan. “Cosmotheism as a Form of Knowledge.” In *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, 204-13. Translated by Andrew Jenkins. New York: Henry Holt, 2002.

C4. Death is not the End: Judgment and the Afterlife

The myths of the Egyptian gods that we have examined so far were not ‘literature’ for the ancient Egyptians; that is they were not stories to be recited merely for pleasure or only so as to appreciate their aesthetic qualities. Rather, the key myths provided the conceptual basis for everyday religious rituals and practices. The myth of Osiris, in particular, provided a guarantee that the detailed preparations that Egyptians carried out for their deaths would be effective: their expected subsequent journeys to the Netherworld would be secure.

RELS 303 ONLY:



Foster, John L. "The Nature of the Beyond: The Prayers of Pahery." In *Hymns, Prayers, and Songs: An Anthology of Ancient Egyptian Lyric Poetry*, 125-31. SBL Writings from the Ancient World 8. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995.

One of the most famous aspects of ancient Egyptian death rituals is mummification. The physical techniques of preserving the deceased's body as a 'mummy' were not carried out for their own sake, but because afterlife existence depended on the careful preservation of the person's body. One's cadaver had to enter the *duat* (Underground world) in order that it could be reunited with its soul (*ba*) and life-force (*ka*), and so be 'ackhtified' or 'glorified' in the afterlife, that is, revived as a spirit or *akh* in the blissful place called 'the Field of Reeds'. The process of mummification and burial in one's tomb therefore had to be carried out correctly, to ensure the success of the body's reunification with *ba* and *ka*.

Now read:



Ikram, Salima. "Afterlife Beliefs and Burial Customs." In *The Egyptian World*, ed. Toby A. H. Wilkinson, 340-50. London: Routledge, 2007.

Sosa, Milagros Álvarez. "How to Make a Mummy in 70 Days or Less." In *National Geographic History* 3 no. 1 (2017): 1, 18-31.

The Osiris cult was centred in Abydos, Upper Egypt, the place of burial for the kings of the 1st Dynasty (around 3000 BC). The ancient 'Mysteries of Osiris' were carried out in Abydos, at various times during the year, in which the death and resurrection of Osiris was re-enacted. It culminated in a procession from the alleged tomb of Osiris (Umm el-Qa'ah) to his Temple in Abydos. Many wealthy Egyptians constructed chapels, or small houses for the dead, along the side of the processional route. This allowed the spirits of the dead to watch the procession and also benefit from the procession, along with the living.

Now read:




Snape, Steven. "Osiris, Lord of Abydos." In *Ancient Egyptian Tombs: The Culture of Life and Death*, 117-35. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

There is a debate as to whether the afterlife that is so clearly promised to the king in the Pyramid Texts was always available to other Egyptians and, if so, to what extent. The major problem we face in addressing this scholarly question is one of limited sources. The Pyramid Texts, which bear the clearest witness to an afterlife in the Old Kingdom, are found in the tombs of kings, i.e., in the pyramids. If there were such sources in other tombs, they have largely not been preserved.

The Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom demonstrate that a similar afterlife was clearly at a later time expected by a wide range of Egyptians. Later still, the similar Books of the Dead written on papyrus, and buried with most mummified Egyptians in the New Kingdom, demonstrate the near universal expectation of a blessed afterlife among Egyptians. In addition, there is some evidence that Egyptians very early on (as early as the 4th Dynasty) recognized that the *akh* (“spirit”) of non-royals could also be revived or ‘glorified’. Such evidence suggests that the afterlife was always an expectation of all Egyptians, even if the king expected a more honourable and exalted afterlife, in accordance with his exalted role in the present world. It is common to read, in scholarship, of the “democratization of the afterlife” for all Egyptians after the Old Kingdom. While the Osiris cult apparently became more popular over time, it is dubious whether the benefits of the afterlife were ever entirely restricted to royalty.


C5. Books of the Netherworld, Letters to the Dead

In the New Kingdom, mummies were usually buried with a papyrus roll of the Book of the Dead. Many of the spells and hymns and instructions contained in the Book of the Dead are derived from similar earlier compositions in the Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, but there are many new chapters too. Each of the many copies of the Book of the Dead was personalised so that it applied to the deceased by his or her name, and a selection of the total available chapters was included in each book. The book’s primary purpose is revealed in the Egyptian title for what we call the Book of the Dead, which is included in many copies: the “Book of Going Forth by Day”. That is, the Book of the Dead allows the deceased to leave and return to their tomb. It provides spells for the initial dangerous journey into the Netherworld, as well as spells for access to the house of Osiris and the paradisaical “Field of Reeds” where the dead were believed to live in the afterlife. It also allows for the *ba*’s free return to his tomb. A number of spells also provide for the deceased’s transformation into desired forms in the Netherworld.


<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Faulkner, Raymond O. <i>The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead</i>, 24-25, 28-35, 86, 89, 133-35. Revised edition. Austin: University of Texas, 1985.</p>
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By contrast, the so-called Books of the Netherworld were composed to guide deceased kings in their 12-hour journey with the sun god Re through the Underworld on his night-barque. These include compositions such as the Amduat (or ‘What is in the Netherworld’), The Book of Gates, the Book of Caverns, the Book of the Earth, the Books of Heaven/Sky, and the Book of the Celestial Cow, and the Litany of Re. The royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings are filled with

Books of the Netherworld, which aren't in fact 'books' in our sense. Written on the walls of the tomb, the Books of the Netherworld combine illustrations and hieroglyphics to describe the geography and inhabitants of the world beyond.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Hornung, Erik. "Exploring the Beyond." Translated by David Roscoe. In <i>The Quest for Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt</i>, ed. Erik Hornung and Betsy M. Bryan, 25-33, 39-50. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2002.</p>
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Living people made attempts to communicate with their deceased relatives, even composing 'letters to the dead'. The letters typically outline everyday concerns for the living, such as property disputes, or problems with relatives, or how to gain protection from one's opponents and enemies. The dead were believed to have the power to intercede on behalf of their living family members in the Netherworld. They could convince a deceased person or one of the gods to show favour to themselves or to their living relatives.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Wente, Edward. "Letters to the Dead and to Gods." In <i>Letters from Ancient Egypt</i>, 210, 212-13, 214, 216-17. Writings from the Ancient World 1. Georgia: Scholars Press, 1990.</p>
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C6. Doing *Ma'at*: Egyptian Ethics and Order


The claim has frequently been made that Judaism initiated a fundamentally new type of religion when it claimed that there was only one God and he was deeply concerned with human behaviour and ethics. Franz Pritz (1833) popularized the term "ethical monotheism" (*ethischer Monotheismus*) to describe prophetic Judaism, a form of religion that he claimed was later perfected by Christianity (a not unexpected claim for a Catholic theologian). But nineteenth-century discoveries of long-lost Egyptian texts would soon challenge this alleged uniqueness of Judeo-Christian "ethical monotheism". It was discovered that Egyptian religion as early as the third millennium BC, but peaking in the New Kingdom, placed a strong emphasis on ethical behaviour, as a prerequisite for the blessed afterlife. Central to ancient Egyptian religion, in particular, was the practice of *ma'at* ("right ordering"), the roughly equivalent term for what we call 'ethics'. In addition, New Kingdom theology developed a form of (usually inclusive) monotheism centred on the sun god as the ultimate divine power working through all other, lower gods. Therefore Egypt, not Israel, is more deserving of being credited as the world's first religion of "ethical monotheism".

A 2019 study by Harvey Whitehouse *et al* addresses the question of when and under what socio-political circumstances gods are attributed with concern for human ethical behaviour. Although we have come to expect that ethics goes hand-in-hand with religion, this is reasonably unusual in the overall history of the world. Most cultures before the rise of Christianity and Islam had religions in which the gods showed little concern for ethical behaviour. The Whitehouse study notes that, in ancient Egypt, the first recorded references to divine concern for *ma'at* appear as early as ca. 2800 BC. This is some three centuries after the unification of Egypt under Menes/Narmer. More broadly, the study finds from its survey of ancient civilizations throughout the world that “moralizing gods” usually precede the development of highly “complex” societies by a number of centuries.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Whitehouse, Harvey. “Complex Societies Precede Moralizing Gods Throughout World History.” <i>Nature</i> 568/7751 (Apr 2019): 226-29.</p>
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We cannot however simply equate our own concept of ‘ethics’ with the Egyptian concept of *ma'at*. Unlike the modern term, *ma'at* encompasses a concern not only for moral but also for cosmic order: a combination which is personified in the goddess Ma'at. Another misconception of *ma'at* is that Egyptians understood it in the same way throughout their long history. This is not the case; to the contrary, there are discernible developments in the way that *ma'at* was conceived between the Old Kingdom and New Kingdom. In particular, there is an increasing perception that the gods were concerned with the upholding of *ma'at*, and a decreasing expectation that being good in this world necessarily led to this-worldly success. Each of these developments may be detected in the New Kingdom text, *The Instruction of Amenemope*.

New Kingdom texts also emphasise that only the righteous would be admitted into the blessed afterlife experienced in the Field of Reeds. The deceased faced a Judgment before the gods at the beginning of their journey to the Netherworld, the so-called ‘Weighing of the Heart’, which is described in some detail in Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead. The late-New Kingdom ‘Books of the Netherworld’ also provide much more detail, often lurid, of the punishments meted out to those with impure hearts.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Ockinga, Boyo G. “Morality and Ethics.” In <i>The Egyptian World</i>, ed. Toby A. H. Wilkinson 252-63. London: Routledge, 2007.</p> <p>Lichtheim, Miriam. “The Instruction of Amenemope.” <i>Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings. Volume II: The New Kingdom</i>, 146-63. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.</p>
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C7. Akhenaton and the Monotheistic Revolution

One of the most celebrated pieces of ancient Egyptian literature is the Middle Kingdom text, *The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba*. Its evident concern with ethical living is mixed with a despair for the vicissitudes of life. In the literary conceit of this text, a man finds himself divided: he has a debate with his own soul (*ba*), arguing with his soul as to whether life is worth living. The missing opening section of the text, and the literary qualities of what remains, make the text's meaning ambiguous. As a result, a number of different interpretations have been made of this justly celebrated text.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Lichtheim, Miriam. "The Dispute Between a Man and his Ba." In <i>Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings. Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms</i>, 164-69. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.</p>
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In the mid-nineteenth century, Egyptologist Karl Richard Lepsius discovered from his excavations at Amarna (ancient Akhetaten) in Middle Egypt that, for a short, two-decade period, Egypt had introduced an exclusive monotheism. This period of Egyptian monotheism had been long forgotten, deliberately erased by later Pharaohs. Akhenaton (originally named Amenhotep IV, 1350-1334 BC) introduced a monotheistic revolution to Egypt, identifying Aten the sun disc as the One God. Although references to other gods remained in the early years, worship was increasingly focused on the Aten. Lepsius even found that Akhenaton had hacked out the names of all other gods and goddesses from all public monuments and accessible private tombs, and destroyed their images during his monotheistic revolution. Egypt, not Israel, had inaugurated the world's first monotheistic religion.


To a large extent, the radical religion of Akhenaton had been prepared for by the increased emphasis on the cult of the sun god in earlier New Kingdom texts. The *Two Hymns to the Sun god*, which we looked at earlier, exemplify this high view of the sun god, and were probably written during the reign of Akhenaton's father, Amenhotep III.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Teeter, Emily. "The Amarna Period: Practical Aspects of 'Monotheism'". In <i>Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt</i>, 161-81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.</p>
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C8. Farewell Akhenaton: the Origins of Ancient Religion

Although ancient Egypt did not compose anything resembling a modern ‘theology’ (an exposition about the gods or God), the work from the Amarna Period which best outlines the new theology of Aten is *The Great Hymn to the Aten*. The *Great Hymn* was discovered in the Tomb of Aya, the brother of Akhenaten’s mother Tiye. Unlike similar Egyptian compositions, the *Great Hymn* is notable for its more common, everyday language, and its lack of mythic references. The monotheistic revolution introduced a stark and iconoclastic focus on the sun disc itself, together with a demythologization of earlier accounts of the sun god’s daily journey across the sky.

Although imagery of the Aten continued to be used in the initial years of Pharaoh Tutankhamon’s reign (the second Pharaoh after Akhenaton), it abruptly ceases soon after that. Tutankhamon later published his “Reformation Stela”, which proclaimed the end of Akhenaten’s monotheistic revolution and the renewal of the old cults of the gods, expressing regret that offerings to the gods had been ‘forgotten’. The Pharaoh once again associated himself with gods such as Amun-Re, Atum of Heliopolis, Re-Harakhty, Ptah, and Thoth, as their main representative on earth. Exclusive monotheism accordingly ceased in the Ancient Near East until the mid-first millennium, when it evolved once more from polytheism, but this time in the province of Judea.

<p>Now read:</p> 	<p>Hornung, Erik. “The Great Hymn to the Aten.” In <i>Akhenaten and the Religion of Light</i>, 79-83. Translated by David Lorton. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.</p> <p>Pritchard, James B., ed. “Tut-ankh-Amon's Restoration after the Amarna Revolution.” In <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i>, Vol. 2, pp. 251-52. Third edition; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.</p>
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