

## Syllabus Mesopotamian religious traditions 2024–2025

**Name of the course:** Mesopotamian religious traditions

**Syllabus academic years:** 2024–2025

**Lecturer:** Ludovica Bertolini

**Number of lessons:** 7 frontal lessons + student's essays

**Hours per lesson:** 2

**Language of instruction:** English

**Type of attestation:** credit (zápočet)

**Requirements for acquiring the credits:** 15 minutes presentations or essays in English on assigned topics.

### Mesopotamian Religious Traditions:

The aim of the present course is to provide the students with a comprehensive knowledge of the religious systems developed during the long history of Mesopotamia.

The course will be divided into two parts. The first one (lessons nos. 1-6) will be committed to frontal lectures to be presented to the students. During these lessons, the main topics related to Mesopotamian religious beliefs will be analyzed thoroughly also by referring directly to highly relevant excerpts from the emic literature (in translation).

The choice of compositions (see below) fell on outstanding traditional texts that display the religious constructs of different stages in the history of Mesopotamia. The diachronic approach will allow the students to detect changes and developments in this highly flexible and permeable religious system.

In the second part of the course (no lessons in this phase only the student's work is required), the students will be asked to actively participate preparing essays on topics previously agreed upon with the teacher.

### Lessons breakdown:

1. Polytheism and religious system in Mesopotamia.
2. Temples, temple personnel and the Temple building:
  - a. Physical structure,
  - b. Temples as houses,
  - c. Temples as households,
  - d. Temple officials
3. Communicating with the gods:
  - a. Divination
  - b. Dreams
  - c. Prayers
  - d. Hymns
  - e. Spells
4. Creations:
  - a. Anthropogonies
    - i. Eridu Genesis or Sumerian Creation Myth
    - ii. Debate between sheep and grain
    - iii. Debate between winter and summer

- iv. Barton cylinder
    - v. The song of the Hoe
  - b. World ordering
    - i. Enki and Ninmaḥ,
    - ii. Enki and the World Order
    - iii. Enuma Eliš
- 5. Destructions:
  - a. Flood stories (Atraḥasis, Utanapištim in the Gilgameš Epos, Ziusudra in the Sumerian Creation Myth)
  - b. Lament for Ur
  - c. The Curse of Agade and Naram-Sîn in The Babylonian Chronicles [Weidner];
  - d. Nin-me-šar<sub>2</sub>-ra
- 6. Death, the Netherworld, demons and liminal figures:
  - a. Gilgameš Epos;
  - b. Ur-Namma A
  - c. The Death of Gilgameš
  - d. Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld and the Descent of Ištar
  - e. Nergal and Ereškigal
  - f. The Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince
  - g. Cemetery and burials
  - h. (Incantations against demons, Lamaštu, evil spells);
- 7. The king and the gods:
  - a. Divine kingship
  - b. Mediation between cosmic spheres
  - c. Kingship as a divine construct
  - d. Sumerian King List
  - e. The kings of Uruk
  - f. Akītu Festival

10-13. Students' work

#### Relevant bibliography:

- Hrůša, I., *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion: A Descriptive Introduction*, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015.
- Lambert, W.G. – George, A. – Oshima, T., *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion and Mythology*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016.
- Kraus, F. R. "The Role of Temples from the Third Dynasty of Ur," *Monographs of the Ancient Near East* vol. 2 fascicle 4. Malibu: Undena publications, 1990. PDF
- Roaf, M. *et al.* "Palaces and Temples in Ancient Mesopotamia." In *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East ; 1*, vol. 1, 1995, pp. 423-441.

- Hundley, M. B. “Divine Presence in Ancient Near Eastern Temples,” *Religion Compass* 9/7, 2015, pp. 203-215.
- George, A. R. *Cosmogony in ancient Mesopotamia* (translation from *Die Kosmogonie des alten Mesopotamien*, in: Marion Gindhart and Tanja Pommerening (eds.), *Anfang & Ende: vormoderne Szenarien von Weltenstehung und Weltuntergang* (Darmstadt: von Zabern, 2016) 7–25, 132–33, 140 [PDF].
- Lambert, W. G. *Babylonian Creation Myths*. Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, 2013. [extracts]
- Lenzi, A. *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns: An Introduction*. Atlanta: society of Biblical Literature. [till page 68]
- Gabbay, U. “The Performance of Emesal Prayers within the Regular Temple Cult: Content and Ritual Setting,” In K. Kaniuth, A. Löhnert, J. L. Miller, A. Otto, M. Roaf, W. Sallaberger (eds.), *Tempel im Alten Orient (7. Internationales Colloquium der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 11.-13. Oktober 2009, München)* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, pp. 103-123.
- Gabbay, U. ““We Are Going to the House in Prayer”: Theology, Cultic Topography, and Cosmology in the emesal Prayers of Ancient Mesopotamia,” In Ragavan D. (ed.), *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Rituals and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World*. Chicago: The oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2013, pp. 223-244.
- Ambos, C. “Temporary Ritual structures and Their Cosmological symbolism in Ancient Mesopotamia,” In Ragavan D. (ed.), *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Rituals and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World*. Chicago: The oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2013, pp. 245-258.
- Ragavan, D. “Entering Other Worlds: Gates, Rituals, and Cosmic Journeys in Sumerian Sources,” In Ragavan D. (ed.), *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Rituals and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World*. Chicago: The oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2013, pp. 201-222.
- Hallo, W. W. “Individual Prayer in Sumerian: The Continuity of a Tradition,” *JAOS* 88/1, 1968, pp. 71-89.
- Delnero, P. *Divination and Religion as a Cultural System* [PDF]
- Schwemer, D. 2011. “Magic Rituals: conceptualization and Performance,” in: Radner, K. – Robson, E. (eds.) *Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*. Oxford: Oxford university Press, 418-444.
- Löhnert, A. 2011. “Manipulating the Gods: Lamenting in Context,” in: Radner, K. – Robson, E. (eds.) *Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*. Oxford: Oxford university Press, 402-417.
- Koch, U. S. 2011. “Sheep and Sky: Systems of Divinatory Interpretation,” in: Radner, K. – Robson, E. (eds.) *Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*. Oxford: Oxford university Press, 447-469.
- Rochberg, F. 2011. “Observing and Describing the World through Divination and Astronomy,” in: Radner, K. – Robson, E. (eds.) *Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*. Oxford: Oxford university Press, 618-637.
- Brisch, N. 2011. “Changing Images of Kingship in Sumerian Literature,” in: Radner, K. – Robson, E. (eds.) *Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*. Oxford: Oxford university Press, 706-724.
- Nakamura, C. “Ritual,” in: Gunter, A. C. *A Companion to Ancient Near Eastern Art*. Wiley Blackwell. 2019. 309-332.

Additional bibliography will be discussed during the lectures. Moreover, the students will be individually provided with supplementary specialistic bibliography in accordance with the topic chosen for the presentation.