

## REL 206: GRAECO-ROMAN RELIGIONS

Spring 2002

Professor Patricia Miller  
Office hours: Th 3-4:30 (501 HL)  
[plmiller@syr.edu](mailto:plmiller@syr.edu)

Teaching Assistant: Alyssa Beall  
[ajbeall@syr.edu](mailto:ajbeall@syr.edu)

This course introduces students to religious texts and traditions in a formative era of Western history and culture. The focus will be on the variety of religious expression in Graeco-Roman culture, which flourished in the geographical area of the Mediterranean basin during the first five centuries of the common era (a period of history variously designated as "late antiquity," or the "Graeco-Roman era," or the "Hellenistic period"). By looking at such topics as debates about the nature of the gods and access to them (e.g., through oracles, magic, and ritual), the emergence of the idea of the holy person or "friend of God," and the clash of religious traditions as seen in art, we will develop an understanding of a rich religious imagination that is truly different from contemporary understandings of religion and yet strangely familiar as well.

### Texts

1. Antonia Tripolitis, *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age*
2. Marvin Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts*
3. Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*
4. Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (trans. by Jack Lindsay)
5. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (trans. by Maxwell Staniforth)

These are available for purchase in Follett's Orange Student Bookstore in Marshall Square Mall.

Other Graeco-Roman texts are available through web-sites, as noted within, and there will be occasional handouts. Please note: you can find this syllabus through the Religion Department homepage; the texts that are available on the web have been hot-linked for your convenience.

### Schedule of Readings

Introduction: Jan. 14-17/**Read** Tripolitis, *Religions*, pp. 9-15

#### I. Religious Attitudes and Practices: Apuleius' *Golden Ass* as Paradigm

A. Lucius as "Graeco-Roman Everyman": Jan. 22-24/**Content Quiz Jan. 22**

Reading: *Golden Ass*, chs. 1-3  
Tripolitis, pp. 16-36

handout: magical texts

Optional: the Apuleius homepage is well worth a look—

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu:80/jod/apuleius>

(lots of good stuff on ancient magic!)

B. Lucius' adventures as an ass and the Great Mother: Jan. 29-31

Reading: *Golden Ass*, chs. 4-8

Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, pp. 113-120, 125-130

C. The Salvation of Lucius and Isis: Feb. 5-7/**Content Quiz Feb. 5**

Reading: *Golden Ass*, chs. 9-11

Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, pp. 157-176

II. Mystery Religions Finale: Mithraism: Feb. 12-14

Reading: Tripolitis, *Religions*, pp. 47-59

Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, pp. 197-221

**First Take-Home Essay Due, Feb. 14 (Topic: Mystery Religions)**

III. Philosophy and Religion: Feb. 19-26/**Content Quiz Feb. 19**

Reading: Tripolitis, *Religions*, pp. 36-46

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (read about one-third for each day)

IV. Judaism: Feb. 28-Mar. 7

Reading: Tripolitis, *Religions*, pp. 91-117

Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, pp. 225-231

**Spring Break Mar. 10-17**

V. Early Christianity and the “Friends of God”

A. Mission and Conversion: Mar. 19-21/**Content Quiz Mar. 19**

Reading: *Acts of Paul and Thecla*

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/thecla.html>

Tripolitis, *Religions*, pp. 91-117

B. Martyrdom: Mar. 26

Reading: *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.html>

C. Asceticism: Mar. 28-Apr. 4/**Content Quiz Mar. 28**

Reading: Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony*: Mar. 28-Apr. 2

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/vita-antony.html>

Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of St. Macrina*: Apr. 4

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/macrina.html#life>

## **Second Take-Home Essay Due, Apr. 9 (Topic: Early Christian Asceticism)**

### VI. The Clash of Gods in Art

#### A. The Chariot and the Donkey: Apr. 9-11/**Content Quiz Apr. 9**

Reading: Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, chs.1-2

#### B. The Magician and the God-Man: Apr. 16-18/**Content Quiz Apr. 16**

Reading: Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, chs. 3-4

#### C. Christ Chameleon: Apr. 23-25/**Content Quiz Apr. 23**

Reading: Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, chs. 5-6

#### D. Icons: Apr. 30

Reading: Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, ch. 7

## **Requirements**

1. **Attendance is required and will be recorded.** Each student will be given two unexcused absences; thereafter, each absence will result in a 5-point deduction from your final point total. Excused absences are defined as medical and family emergencies and must be documented. *Please arrive in class on time; lateness is disruptive for everyone.*
2. **Active participation in class discussions. In order to be successful in this course, you must read all assignments carefully. Everything depends on this. Please bring the ancient texts that we are discussing to class.**
3. **A series of 8 Content Quizzes: 5 questions, 5 points.** They are listed on the syllabus; please keep track of these dates. The Content Quizzes will test your knowledge of essential information (dates, people, places, events, themes, etc.) that you will need in order to grasp broader issues in the study of ancient Mediterranean religions. Total possible points: 40.
3. **Two Take-Home Essays.** The first essay will be on the Mystery Religions, and the second will be on Early Christian Asceticism. The instructor will hand out topic

sheets approximately two weeks in advance of the due-dates. There is no extra research required. Unlike the Content Quizzes, these essays will allow you to polish your analytical, reflective, and writing skills. 50 points each. Total possible points: 100.

4. **A Cumulative Final Examination, in class: Monday, May 6, 12:30-2:30.** 60 points.

Total possible points for the course: 200.

***PLEASE NOTE: We are not able to accept late work; it is bad for you and bad for us. Schedule your time carefully. There will be no make-up quizzes, and the final examination will not be given early to anyone.***