This seminar will explore the various forms and functions of scriptures, primarily in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. We will start with the phenomena of scriptures in modern cultures and trace them back through early modern, medieval and late antique cultures. The seminar will end by exploring the religious, literary, and political factors that affected the development and canonization of scripture in ancient Judaism and early Christianity, and shaped the idea of authoritative scripture in all three Western religious traditions.

Course Requirements:
Students are expected to discuss in class all the required readings (listed below after Assignment) and as much additional literature (listed as Background) as necessary to understand the developments under discussion. In addition, each student will (1) prepare and present a report on one additional book or set of essays (listed after Report), and (2) write a substantive and original research paper on a subject related to the course topic, presenting the class with a preliminary summary during the last class meetings. The finished research papers are due on or before May 13th. The students' work will be evaluated on the basis of class participation (20%), the oral and written book report (20%), the research presentation (10%) and the final research paper (50%). Late papers and reports will not be eligible for "A" grades.

Required Texts:

The assigned articles, except biblical texts and those marked by a minus (-), are available electronically.
The required textbooks are for sale in the Bookstore and also available on reserve in Bird Library. For further resources relevant to the topic of this course, consult the **Background** readings, the other articles in the collections cited below and also the annotated bibliography in *Canonization and Decanonization* 435-506.

**Topics and Readings** (for full citations, see bibliography below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Texts:</th>
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</table>
| Aug 28| Introductions                        | **Assignment:** Graham, “Scripture”  
Peters, *Voice* 1-37, 271-276                                            |
|       |                                     | **Assignment:** W.C. Smith, “The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible”  
Watts, “Three Dimensions of Scriptures,” *IB&T*  
Malley, *How the Bible Works* (all)  
Pulis, “In the Beginning”  
**Background:**  
Greenberg, “On the Political Use of the Bible in Modern Israel”  
- Neil, “Criticism and Theological Use,” *CHB* 3:238-293 |
| Sep 4 | The Texts of Scriptures              | **Assignment:** Peters, *Voice* 247-70  
Graham, *Beyond the Written Word* (all)  
Yoo, “Public Scripture Reading Rituals”  
**Background:**  
Kassam, “Signifying Revelation in Islam”  
Gold, *Making the Bible Modern* 10-24  
- Halbertal, *People of the Book* 129-34 |
| Sep 11| The Performance of Scriptures        | **Assignment:** Peters, *Voice* 219-46  
Marty, “America's Iconic Book”  
*Iconic Books & Texts* (all)  
Watts, "Iconic Books and Texts"  
Browse *The Iconic Books Blog*;  
**Report:** Myrvold, *Death of Sacred Texts*  
**Background:**  
Legendre, “La totémisation de la société”  
Kinnard, "Buddhist Bibliolators" |
| Sep 18| NO CLASS                             | **Prepare for next week!** |
| Sep 25| The Iconicity of Scriptures           | **Assignment:** Moore & Sherwood, "Biblical Studies 'After' Theory" (3 articles)  
Hill, “Charles Augustus Briggs, Modernism and the Rise”  
Sugirtharajah, “Known Knowns and Unknown Unknowns”  
Beal, "Reception History and Beyond"  
Pasulka, “Premodern Scriptures in Postmodern Times”  
**Report:** Bielo, *The Social Life of Scriptures* |
| Oct 2 | Bible in Late Modernity & Postmodernity | **Assignment:** Kugel, “The Bible in the University”  
Heyman, “Canon Law and the Canon of Scripture”  
Wimbush, *White Men's Magic* (all)  
review Malley, “Bible in British Folklore,” *IB&T*  
**Background:**  
<p>| Oct 9 | Bible in Early Modernity              |<br />
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<tr>
<th>Oct 16</th>
<th>Medieval Islam, Translations, &amp; Manuscripts</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Assignment:</strong> Peters, <em>Voice</em> 120-51</td>
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<td>Goering, “Introduction to Medieval Christian Biblical Interpretation”</td>
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<td>Walfish, “Introduction to Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation”</td>
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<td>McAuliffe, “Introduction to Medieval Interpretation of the Qur’an”</td>
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<td>Pulcini, <em>Exegesis as Polemical Discourse</em> 13-56</td>
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<td>Morey, <em>Book and Verse</em> 1-8</td>
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<td>Kessler, “The Book as Icon”</td>
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<td><strong>Report:</strong> Morey, <em>Book and Verse</em></td>
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<td><strong>Background:</strong> Al-Azmeh, “The Muslim Canon”</td>
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<td>Sweetman, “Beryl Smalley and Performative Reading”</td>
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<td>- Borg, “Canon and Social Control”</td>
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<td>- Dijk, “Bible in Liturgical Use,” <em>CHB</em> 2:220-251</td>
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<td>- Articles under “Vernacular Scriptures,” <em>CHB</em> 2:338-491</td>
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<td>- Halbertal, <em>People of the Book</em> 90-128, 137-144</td>
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<td>- Wheeler, <em>Applying the Canon in Islam</em></td>
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<th>Oct 23</th>
<th>Ancient Christianity &amp; Book Myths</th>
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<td><strong>Assignment:</strong> - Luke 1-2; 2 Timothy 3:14-17</td>
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<td>Peters, <em>Voice</em> 105-19, 152-218</td>
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<td>Miller, &quot;Words with an Alien Voice&quot;</td>
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<td>Humfress, &quot;Judging by the Book&quot;</td>
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<td>Van der Horst, &quot;Sortes: Sacred Books ...&quot;</td>
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<td>Parmenter, “The Bible as Icon: Myths of Divine Origins”</td>
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<td><strong>Report:</strong> Klingshirn &amp; Safran, <em>The Early Christian Book</em></td>
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<td><strong>Background:</strong> Childs, &quot;The Problem of the Christian Bible&quot;</td>
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<td>Rapp, &quot;Holy Texts, Holy Men, Holy Scribes&quot;</td>
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<td>- Lamb, &quot;...Bible in the Liturgy,&quot; <em>CHB</em> 1:563-586</td>
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<td>- Barton, <em>Holy Writings, Sacred Text</em></td>
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<th>Oct 30</th>
<th>Rabbinic Judaism &amp; Competing Canons</th>
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<td><strong>Due:</strong> Paper topics and texts</td>
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<td><strong>Assignment:</strong> 2 Maccabees 7</td>
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<td>Mishnah Berakhot 1:1-4; 4:1-7</td>
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<td>Halbertal, <em>People of the Book</em> 45-89</td>
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<td>Alexander, &quot;Homer, the Prophet...&quot;</td>
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<td>Rutgers, &quot;Importance of Scripture&quot; 287-303</td>
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<td>Zevit, “The Second-Third Century Canonization”</td>
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<td><strong>Background:</strong> - Vermes, &quot;Bible and Midrash,&quot; <em>CHB</em> 1:199-231</td>
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<td>Neusner &amp; Green, <em>Writing with Scripture</em></td>
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<th>Oct 30</th>
<th>Guest Lecture: &quot;How We Got Four Gospels&quot;</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Pheme Perkins, Boston University</td>
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<td>3 p.m., Noble Room, Hendricks</td>
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|          | **Assignment:** Peters, *Voice* 38-79 |
|          | Sheppard, “Canon” |
|          | J.Z. Smith, “Sacred Persistence” |
Rothberg-Halton, "Canonicity in Cuneiform Texts"?  
Kooij, "The Canonization of Ancient Books"  
Lang, "The 'Writings': A Hellenistic Literary Canon"  
Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Text*, 106-130  
**Background:** Lust, "Quotation formulae and Canon in Qumran"  
Ulrich, "The Bible in the Making" |
| Nov 13 | Literacy & Orality | **Due:** Paper thesis, bibliography and outline  
**Assignment:** Foster, tr., "Pious Scholar"  
Peters, *Voice* 80-104  
**Background:** - Davies, *Scribes and Schools* |
| Nov 20 | Icons & Books | **Assignment:** - Exodus 24, Deuteronomy 31; 2 Kings 22-23;  
Nehemiah 8  
Levinson, *Deuteronomy* vii-viii, 3-22, 144-157  
Van der Toorn, “The Iconic Book"  
Watts, “Political and Legal Uses”  
Sarefield, "Symbolics of Book Burning"  
W.C. Smith, "Scripture as Form and Concept"  
**Background:** - Wiseman, "Books in the Ancient Near East"  
*CHB* 1:30-48  
Watts, "Rhetoric of Scripture"  
- Hallo, *The Context of Scripture* |
| Nov 27 | Thanksgiving Break | No Class |
| Dec 4 | Paper presentations | |
| Dec 15 | Research Papers Due | |

Course Bibliography:  
(see also the [topically categorized bibliography](#) on iconic books)

Collections of essays:

- *The Bible and the American Myth: A Symposium on the Bible and the Construction of Meaning* (Macon: Mercer University Pres, 1999)  
- *The New Cambridge History of the Bible (NCHB)*, 2 vols. to date (Cambridge: Cambridge
• Canonization and Decanonization, with An Annotated Bibliography by J. A. M. Snoek, eds. A. van der Kooij, K. van der Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1998)
• Iconic Books and Texts (IB&T), ed. J. W. Watts (Sheffield and Bristol: Equinox, 2013)
• The Impact of Scripture on Early Christianity, ed. J. den Boeft & M. L. van Poll-van de Lisdonk (Leiden: Brill, 1999)
• The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World, ed. L.V. Rutgers et al (Leuven: Peeters, 1998)

Books and articles:

• Akenson, Donald Harmon. Surpassing Wonder: The Invention of the Bible and the Talmuds (Chicago, 1998).
• Al-Azmeh, A. “The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism” in Canonization and Decanonization 191-228.
• Alexander, Philip S. ”'Homer the Prophet of All' and 'Moses our Teacher': Late Antique Exegesis of the Homeric Epics and of the Torah of Moses," in Use of Sacred Books 127-142.
• Alter, Robert. Canon and Creativity: Modern Writing and the Authority of Scripture (New Haven: Yale, 2000).
• Barton, John. Holy Writings, Sacred Text: the Canon in Early Christianity (Louisville: WJK, 1997)


Brown, Michelle P. "“Images to be Read and Words to be Seen: The Iconic Role of the Early Medieval Book,” *Postscripts* 6 (2010), 39-66 = *IB&T*, 93-118.


Crehan, F.J. "The Bible in the Roman Catholic Church from Trent to the Present Day," *CHB*


Denny, Frederick M. "Recitation of the Quran," *Islam and the Muslim Community* (San
• Denny, Frederick and Rodney Taylor, eds. The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1985).
• Foster, Benjamin. Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature (Bethesda: CDL, 1993).
• Halbertal, Moshe. People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority (Harvard, 1997)
• Harrisville, Roy A. & Walter Sundberg. The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).


Sawyer, John F.A. Sacred Languages and Sacred Texts (London: Routledge, 1999)


Watts, James W. “Desecrating Scriptures,” a case study for the Luce Project in Religion, Media and International Relations at Syracuse University, 2009 (online).

Watts, James W. "Disposing of Non-Disposable Texts." In Myrvold, Death of Sacred Texts (2010), 147-60.


Wiseman, D.J. "Books in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament," CHB 1:30-48