

**CLASSICS 201**  
**MAGIC AND MYSTERY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD**  
**SPRING 2011**

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**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Meyer, Marvin M., ed. *Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999. (Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*)

Ogden, Daniel, ed. *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. (Ogden, MWG; note: bold numbers indicate selection numbers, **NOT** page numbers)

Books are available at the Oberlin College Bookstore. PDF files of readings and other course materials available on **BlackBoard**. Readings for the course will consist of translations of ancient sources; occasionally, scholarly articles will supplement work with the original sources. In each class meeting, we will discuss the assigned readings in order to evaluate and assess the day's topic. Please come prepared with questions about the readings as well as your own interpretations of the material.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course surveys the evidence for magic and the occult in antiquity, focusing on the traditions of ancient Greece and Rome. Topics covered include theoretical approaches to magic, practitioners (witches, sorcerers, and priests), magical objects (curse tablets, voodoo dolls, and amulets), magical words (spells and prayers), ancient mystery cults, and the interaction between early Christianity and magic. Special attention will be paid to how ancient individuals interacted with the unseen world in their daily lives, and when and how they employed the services of professional magicians.

The course adopts a historical framework for analyzing ancient magical and religious practices in order to understand how these traditions changed over time. The material covered in the course will include ancient literary texts, inscriptions, and artifacts. By analyzing these different classes of evidence, you will be able to gain a broader understanding of ancient ritual behavior within its cultural context and how cultural practices are reconstructed from limited source material.

## COURSE GOALS

This course is intended to assist students in achieving the following goals:

- Students should become familiar with the practices of magic and the rituals of the mystery religions during the historical period of classical antiquity (ca. 800 BCE – 500 CE).
- Students should understand the process by which ancient texts and artifacts are used to create a narrative about the past by learning how to critically read and interpret ancient sources in translation
- Students should understand how ancient magic and mystery cults fit into the larger cultural context of antiquity and how these rituals and actions changed over time.
- Students should improve their written communication skills by generating essays with a succinct and well supported thesis. Students will learn how to use ancient sources of evidence as well as secondary sources to make arguments about the past.

### Course Requirements

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| Paper 1 (1-2 pages):                             | 10 %          |
| Midterm Exam:                                    | 20 %          |
| Abstract and Annotated Bibliography for Paper 2: | 7.5 %         |
| Paper 2 (5-7 pages):                             | 25 %          |
| Final:   | 25 %          |
| <u>Attendance and Participation:</u>             | <u>12.5 %</u> |
| <b>Total:</b>                                    | <b>100 %</b>  |

*Papers:* Two papers will be required during the semester. Papers must be submitted via Blackboard as a Microsoft Word Document. If you use Word Perfect or another program, you must convert your paper to Word before submission. **Papers should be 500-800 words.** The first paper is intended to be a brief (2-3 pages) discussion of a particular theme. In paper # 1, you will be asked to compare two literary depictions of witches. Details of this paper topic will be distributed on February 22; this paper will be due **March 3**.

The second paper will be longer (5-7 pages) and must be on a topic related to magic or mystery cults in antiquity. I will distribute a list of possible topics in class, but you are free to choose any topic that you want. This paper must include a thesis that is supported by both primary (ancient texts in translation) and secondary sources (modern scholarship). My class lectures are not an acceptable source and should not appear on your bibliography. Books will be placed on the reserve at the library and you are encouraged to use these and additional sources. An abstract and annotated bibliography with at least three (3) sources will be due **April 6**. We will have a library session on **March 10** to explain how to compose abstracts and annotated bibliographies. Paper # 2 will be due **May 8**.

Late papers will be graded down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late (i.e. an 'A' paper becomes an 'A-' on the first day the paper is late, then a 'B+' on the second day, and so on).

*Midterm and Final:* The midterm will be given on March 15. This exam will cover material discussed in class up to and including the class on March 10. The final exam will be given at

**9:00 AM on Saturday May 21.** This exam will cover principally (but not exclusively) material discussed after the midterm. **I do not grant academic incompletes.**

*Attendance and Participation:* Class attendance and participation are necessary parts of the learning process. I will be taking attendance in class, and excessive absences will affect your final grade in the course. You are responsible for getting notes and determining what occurred during any missed class. In case of foreseen absences on exam dates, you must contact me well before the scheduled exam date and exams must be taken BEFORE the scheduled date and time. In case of unforeseen absences on test days, you will need to provide proof of illness or another justifiable reason for the missed class. **Due dates for papers are firm.**

*Discussion Board:* Your participation is based in part on your regular contribution to the class discussion board. It is my hope that interactions on the discussion board will help guide your reading of the source materials and will encourage lively in-class discussion of the readings. For each day's reading, I will post a question or two. Students should then post their responses to the questions or post new questions that are prompted by the readings. **Postings must be made at or before 1:00 PM on the class day.** I hope that you will use the discussion board as a chance to interact, and that you will reply to one another's posts. In-class discussions will potentially build on postings to the discussion board, so it will be useful to check the discussion board before class. **Students are required to submit a thoughtful posting in a minimum of eight different boards for different class days over the course of the semester (i.e. multiple posts to the same board or to multiple questions on the same assignment do not count toward the total).**

*Honor Code:* The Oberlin College Honor Code can be found at <http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-regs.html#honor>. You will be expected to abide by the honor code for all written assignments. All work that is turned in should include the signed honor pledge "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment." Grades will not be recorded for work that lacks the honor pledge (though work will be corrected).

*Classroom and testing accommodations:* Students needing accommodation for tests or assignments (i.e., time and a half) should contact the Student Academics Services Office. Please contact this office (<http://www.oberlin.edu/learning/>) at the start of the semester to ensure that the appropriate documentation and classroom accommodation can be provided in a timely fashion. I would also encourage you to speak to me about the accommodation that is worked out with SAS; these discussions will be held in the strictest confidence.

*Changes to the Syllabus:* Minor changes may be made to the syllabus in the course of the semester. In this case, all students will be informed of these changes via email and through an announcement on BlackBoard.

*E-Mail:* I will check email regularly. Please include the course name (CLAS 201: MAGIC AND MYSTERY) in the subject field of your email. All email correspondence will be conducted through your Oberlin account.

*Mobile Phones:* Please turn off phones during class. If a phone rings, there may be a pop quiz.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

*Readings are listed for the class in which they will be discussed.*

Feb 8: Introductions, Syllabus

Feb 10: Ancient Religion in Greece and Rome

Readings: Zaidman, L.B and P.S. Pantel. *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*. (Cambridge, 2002) 3-23, 27-45; Rüpke, Jörg, and Richard Gordon. *Religion of the Romans*. (Cambridge, 2007) 3-24; (posted on Blackboard – Course Documents).

Feb 15: Early Literary Traditions of Magic in Greece: Homer

Readings: Ogden MWG [*note: bold numbers indicate selection numbers, NOT page numbers*] **73, 74, 108, 120, 144, 248**; *Odyssey* Book X. (BB: Homer, *Odyssey* Book X and parts of book XI)

**\*\*\*\*\*Wednesday, Feb 16 - Add/Drop Deadline\*\*\*\*\***

Feb 17: Herodotus, the Magi, and the *Goes*

Readings: Ogden MWG **1-7, 10-14, 36-49, 139, 302-304**.

Feb 22: Witches in Greek Literature

Readings: Ogden MWG **66-70, 76-89, 315-318**

*Paper # 1 Topic Assigned*

Feb 24: The Mysteries at Eleusis

Readings: Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 1-46, 243-251

**Print out and bring to class:** Eleusis\_Map.pdf (on BB)

Mar 1: Death, Ghosts, and Necromancy

Readings: Ogden MWG **15, 25-31, 46, 50, 51, 109-119, 122-126, 133, 137, 145-154, 311-312, 321-322**

Mar 3: Curse Tablets I

Readings: Ogden MWG **16, 168-171, 176-178**. Selections from Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*; Faraone, Christopher. "The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding-Spells." (BB: "Curse Tablets I")

**\*\*\*\*Paper # 1 Due Sunday March 6, 11:59 PM\*\*\*\***

Mar 8: Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abounouteichos

Readings: Ogden MWG **57-63, 136, 313-314**. Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* (BB: "Alexander the False Prophet")

*Research Paper Introduced*

Mar 10: Library Session – Meet in Mudd, Lower Level; please bring ideas about research paper topic.

**Mar 15: Mid Term Exam**

Mar 17: Orphic and Bacchic Cults

Readings: Ogden MWG **18, 19, 20, 21**; Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 61-81, 93-109

**Print out and bring to class:** Plan of the Villa of the Mysteries (on BB)

Mar 22: Magic, Mysteries, and Roman Law

Ogden MWG **126-127, 134, 158, 242, 258, 278-300, 339-340**; Meyer 81-93; please read Ogden MWG **282** in tandem with Meyer)

Mar 24: Magna Mater and Attis

Readings: Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 111-154.

**Mar 29: No Class, Spring Recess**

**Mar 31: No Class, Spring Recess**

Apr 5: Magic in Latin Literature

Readings: Ogden MWG **90-107, 114, 155, 157-160, 165.**

*Bibliographies and Citations*

**\*\*\*\*\*Submit Abstract and Annotated Bibliography for Paper 2 by 11:59 PM  
APRIL 6 via BlackBoard\*\*\*\*\***

Apr 7: Curse Tablets Part II

Readings: Ogden MWG **172-175, 179-188, 191-196, 336**; Selections from Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (BB: "Gager – Curse Tablets II")

Apr 12: Mysteries of Isis and Osiris

Readings: Apuleius, *Metamorphosis* Bk. 11. Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries* 157-174; 193-196. (BB: Metamorphosis\_11)

Apr 14: Egyptian Magic and the Greek Magical Papyri (the *PGM*)

Readings: Ogden MWG **53-56, 131, 132, 156, 161-163, 166, 189, 190, 243, 245, 246, 331**; *PGM VII* (BB: "PGM VII")

Apr 19: Love Magic

Readings: Ogden MWG **52, 197-235, 239, 240, 248, 333-335**. Selection from John Gager *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*; (BB: "Gager – Love Magic")

Apr 21: Magical Gems and Amulets

Readings: Ogden MWG **249-277, 337-338**

Apr. 26: Protective Magic in Architecture

Readings: TBA

Apr 28: Mithras

Readings: Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries* 197-221.

May 3: Elements of Mystery and Magic in Christianity and Judaism

Readings: Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries* 225-253; King, Martin Luther, Jr. "The Influence of Mystery Religions on Christianity" (Link posted on BB)

May 5: Paper Writing Workshop

**\*\*\*\*\*Submit Research Paper by 11:59 PM MAY 8 via BlackBoard\*\*\*\*\***

May 10: Late Antique and Byzantine Magic

Readings: selections from John Gager *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*; selections from Naveh, Joseph and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*; selections from Meyer, Marvin and Richard Smith. *Ancient Christian Magic*. (BB: "Gager – Late Antique" + "Naveh – Amulets" + "Meyer – Ancient Christian Magic")

May 12: The Demonization of Magical Practice

Readings: Ogden MWG 65; Flint, V. "The Demonization of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity." (BB: "Flint – Demonization of Magic")

**FINAL EXAM – SATURDAY MAY 21, 9 – 11 AM**