

Roman Religion and Culture
Barat College RS-293/HUM-293
Fridays; 9:00 -11:50

Instructor:

Jim L. Papandrea, Ph.D.
office hours by appointment

Course Description

The period of the early Roman Empire (first century BCE - fourth century CE) was the most religiously tolerant era in human history. In addition to the pantheon of Greco-Roman deities, various eastern mystery cults and monotheistic philosophies all coexisted with traditional Roman religion. This course will survey the many religious options of Roman culture, the way that Roman religion interacted with society, and the transition of the empire to a Christian state.

Course Requirements

Each class meeting will consist mainly of lecture and discussion; questions and discussion are encouraged at all times. Reading assignments are to be done before each class meeting. All papers for this course must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. If you have a choice of type font and size, use 12 pt. Palatino or Times New Roman. The instructor reserves the right to reduce the grades of late assignments, unless previous arrangements are made with the instructor. All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for the course.

Class participation: Attendance, reading preparation, and class discussion will count for 10% of the course grade.

Exams: There will be two 5-7 page take-home exams: a mid-term exam and a final exam. The exams will focus on synthesizing material from the reading and lectures, specifically the main themes rather than the minor details of the various religious faiths. Each exam will count for 30% of the course grade.

Research Paper: Write a 5-7 page research paper on any religion of your choice that existed in the Roman Empire. This may be a religion discussed in class, but it does not have to be. The point is not to advocate for or against the validity of a particular religion, but to understand it as much as possible, within its historical context. The research paper will count for 30% of the course grade.

Required Reading

The Cults of the Roman Empire by Robert Turcan
The Rise of Christianity by Rodney Stark

Course Schedule

Week 1

Introduction to the Roman Empire, Roman Religion, and Roman Society

Week 2

Read: The Cults of the Roman Empire Introduction and Chapter 1
Roman Culture and Household Religion

Week 3

Read: The Cults of the Roman Empire Chapter 2
Traditional Greco-Roman Mythology

Week 4

Read: The Cults of the Roman Empire Chapter 3
Civic Cults, Government Jobs as Priesthoods, and Emperor Worship

Week 5

Read: The Cults of the Roman Empire Chapters 4 and 5
Eastern Mystery Cults, and other Cosmologies

Week 6 *Hand out Midterm Exam Question*

Read: The Cults of the Roman Empire Chapters 6 and 7
Magic and Astrology

Week 7 *Midterm Exam Due*

Roman Philosophy (No reading assignment - work on Midterm!)

Week 8

Read: The Cults of the Roman Empire Epilogue
Judaism and the Birth of Christianity

Week 9

Read: The Rise of Christianity Chapters 1 and 2
The Apostolic Age

Week 10

Read: The Rise of Christianity Chapters 3 and 4
The Sub-Apostolic Age and the Spread of Christianity

Week 11

Read: The Rise of Christianity Chapters 5 and 6
Interaction and Competition: Christianity, Roman Culture and other Religions

Week 12 No Class - Spring Break

Week 13

Read: The Rise of Christianity Chapters 7 and 8
Persecution and the Politics of Christianity

Week 14

Read: The Rise of Christianity Chapters 9 and 10
The Rise to Power of Constantine and the Emergence of a Christian State

Week 15 *Research Papers Due - Hand out Final Exam Question*

Christianity and the Fall of the Roman Empire (No reading assignment)

Week 16 No Class - Final Exam Due