

Contemporary Theological Trends and Issues: Esotericism, Magic, and Ritual in Late Antiquity

Wheeling Jesuit University
Department of Theology
THEO 434-01
Spring 2019

MWF 12:00-12:50
Donahue 336

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Office Hours: MWF 8:00-8:50 AM; R 12:00-1:00 PM; or by appointment

Catalog Course Description:

The category “magic” in Late Antiquity represented deviance and marginality. However, this classification is undermined by the numerous material and literary survivals of what contemporary people would consider “magical” in the overlapping Greco-Egyptian, Jewish, and Christian worlds. This class examines dream interpretation, ascents to the divine world, exorcism, amulets, love spells, divination through inspired texts, and shortcuts to learning Torah in the Late Antique context. The purpose is to interrogate ancient and contemporary social categories (magic, religion, mysticism, deity, cosmology), foreground ritual as an essential component of meaning, and appreciate the familiar strangeness of the Late Antique period and how it can help shape one's worldview.

Required Textbooks

All required readings for the course will be made available on the Course Documents section of Blackboard in the Course Documents folder. We will be reading portions of the following works.

1. Betz, Hans Dieter, ed. *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*. 2d. ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. ISBN: 0-226-04447-5
2. Janowitz, Naomi. *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Christians, and Jews*. Religion in the First Christian Centuries. London/ New York: Routledge, 2001. ISBN: 0-415-20207-8
3. Meyer, Marvin, and Richard Smith, eds. *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994. ISBN: 0-06-065584-4
4. Uro, Risto. *Ritual and Christian Beginnings: A Socio-Cognitive Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-19-966117-6

5. Janowitz, Naomi. *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity*. Magic in History. University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002. ISBN: 978-0-271-05837-5
6. Harari, Yuval. *Jewish Magic before the Rise of Kabbalah*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017. 0-978-8143-3630-4
7. Davila, James R. *Hekhalot Literature in Translation: Major Texts of Merkavah Mysticism*. Supplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy. Leiden: Brill, 2013. ISBN: 978-90-04-25215-8
8. Naveh, Joseph and Shaul Shaked. *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998. Reprint: Skokie, Ill.: Varda Books, 2009. ISBN: 1-59045-923-7
9. Martin, Luther H. *Studies in Hellenistic Religions*. Selected and edited with an introduction by Panayotis Pachis. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-4982-8308-3
10. Harris-McCoy, Daniel E. *Artemidorus' Oneirocritica: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-19-959347-7
11. Betz, Hans Dieter. *The "Mithras Liturgy": Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003. ISBN: 3-16-148813-X
12. O'Keefe, Daniel Lawrence. *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic*. New York: Continuum, 1982. ISBN: 0-8624-0059-0
13. Wise, Michael, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, eds. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999. ISBN: 0-06-069201-4.

Student Learning Objectives:

Upon their successful completion of this course, students will have met the following goals competently, orally and in writing.

1. Demonstrate skills in sustained close reading of selected texts and rituals in their appropriate Late Antique historical context (Critical Thinking, high).
2. Interrogate and explore the constructed nature of social categories such as magic, religion, the sacred world, and mysticism, both in the Late Antique Period and for contemporary people (Critical Thinking, high; Global Perspectives, high).
3. Demonstrate awareness of ways in which ritual can function in a magical context (Critical Thinking, medium).
4. Think through how engagement with class material and reading affects their own personal sense of self, relationship to the larger world, and core values (Ethical Decision Making, medium).

Questions explored in this class will include the following.

1. Why is magic consistently defined in terms of social deviance and marginality, when it is so common in the Late Antique Period? How are such decisions made?
2. What makes the language used in acts of power effective?

3. What is the relationship between human language and divine language (*angeli vocae*, *nomina barbara*, secret divine names, etc.) used in magical texts? In what sense does this non-intelligible language increase the sense that these ritual acts prove effective?
4. What is the relationship between the appeal of magic and the sense of creeping, generalized anxiety characteristic of the Hellenistic and Late Antique Periods?
5. If magic rituals don't "work" (that is, they have no empirically discernible effects), why do people continue to use them? What positive (psychological?) effects does ritualized ("magical") behavior have?
6. How are magical techniques and methods related and dissimilar for Greco-Egyptian, Jewish, and Christian practitioners?
7. How are these "magical" techniques related to "religious" ones? How, if at all, can "magical" techniques be differentiated from "religious" ones?
8. How do fears about magical practitioners reflect anxieties about gender?
9. What do these magical rituals and acts have to say about the nature of the world, and the nature of the people who are attempting to control it or render it meaningful?
10. What do magical and mystical approaches to the divine world have in common? Why is praise so common in mystical ascents to the heavenly world?
11. How are magical techniques related to practical/ "scientific" concerns such as botany, animal husbandry, medicine, philosophy, etc., in the ancient world? Who gets to define the difference between magic and these concerns, and how do they do so?
12. How do magical expressions exploit symbolic and analogical methods of thinking, and how socially- or individually-defined are these methods?
13. In what ways do I see my own concepts of magic, religion, the sacred world, and the larger social world in a new way as a result of this class? How have I gained a more empathetic perspective on what can initially appear as "strange" ritual practices?

Evaluation Methods

The above questions, as well as others that emerge during class discussions, will form the basis for students' written work in this seminar.

Participation. Participation means sustained engagement in discussion throughout the course, as signaled by consistent attendance on time, having the reading in class with you, and being prepared to raise questions about the reading. It is expected that every student will come prepared to contribute to class every class period.

Dream Paper. Due **February 8**, this paper is intended to represent substantial engagement with material on dreams, interpretation, and divination encountered in class. (There is no independent external research required.) This four to five-page double-spaced paper should deeply engage Artemidorus, the rabbinic discussion of dreams, and the first Vision of Hermas in answering the following questions.

1. Who is authorized to interpret the dream, and which dreams are considered worthy of interpretation?
2. How do interpreters decide the meaning of dreams, and what larger ideas and correspondences guide their interpretations?
3. What kinds of analogies or symbolic correspondences do dream interpreters make?

4. What larger social context makes individual dreams meaningful (or denies their meaning)?
5. What surprised you, interested you, or created a problem for you in studying these dream interpretations? What larger questions were you left with?

Ascent Paper. Due **March 1 by 11:59 PM**, this six to eight-page double-spaced paper is concerned with analyzing the ascent texts and rituals discussed in class. (There is no independent research required.) Engaging with the text of each ascent examined in class (*Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, the “Mithras Liturgy,” Revelation, and Rabbi Nehuniah’s Ascent), think through the questions below, as well as similar ones that may occur to you.

1. What is the goal of the ascent in each text, and how does this relate to the identity of the seeker?
2. What commonalities and differences between these ascents can you discern?
3. How is language, especially “divine” (i.e. non-intelligible to humans) language used in these texts?
4. Why is there such an effusive emphasis on praise in these texts?
5. What dangers are recognized in these ascents, and how does the ascender protect himself/ herself?
6. What larger assumptions about the world do these ascents make?
7. Are these ascents “magical,” “mystical,” “religious,” or something in between? How would you distinguish these concepts?

Final Paper. Due by the end of the final exam period, this eight to ten-page double-spaced paper is intended to serve as a synthesis and analysis of the most important material covered in the course. Special emphasis should be given in your paper to material covered beginning on February 20 (exorcisms), although appropriate material covered before this date can also be selectively included as your argument requires. The questions given above (under Course Objectives) should prove an essential starting point in writing this paper (please pay particular attention to #5, on why magic persists, and #13, what you have personally learned, in writing your paper).

The grading scale and weight of grades are below.

		B+	88-90	C+	78-80	D+	68-70		
A	93-100	B	83-87	C	73-77	D	63-67	F	0-60
A-	91-92	B-	81-82	C-	71-72	D-	61-62		

Participation	20%	Ascent Paper	25%
Dream Paper	20%	Final Paper	35%

Attendance Policy:

Attendance at each class session is recommended. For first-year students and those on academic probation, six hours of class (i.e. **six classes**) may be missed without penalty. No distinction is made between unexcused and excused absences for the purpose of this class. Absences beyond this point without a valid excuse (death in the family; serious injury) will result in a grade of FA

at the sole discretion of the instructor. All late work will lose five points per day late, including weekends.

Last Date to Drop the Course: The last day of the Add/Drop Period for this semester is Friday, January 11, 2019. The last day to withdraw from this course with a grade of a W is Tuesday, March 26, 2019.

Disability Statement:

Wheeling Jesuit University offers students with documented disabilities individual accommodations on a case-by case basis with confidentiality in compliance with the American with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

In order to receive academic or physical accommodations, students with disabilities must provide current (within three years) and comprehensive documentation concerning the nature and extent of the disability and communicate their needs to the Disability Services Director, located in Ignatius Hall Room G 24 or call 304-243-4484. Students are required to meet with the director to develop accommodation plans that they will present to their course instructors at the beginning of each semester. Students with disabilities that require specific housing accommodations must contact both the Director of Residence Life and the Disability Services Director.

Ultimately, all students with disabilities are responsible for their own academic achievement. They must attend classes, complete course assignments, and fulfill all university requirements for their chosen field of study. It is up to students with disabilities to seek out available assistance on campus and to utilize individualized accommodations that promote academic success.

Academic Integrity Statement:

Students are advised that WJU's Academic Integrity Policy will strictly be enforced in this course (see www.wju.edu/studenthandbook). Questions regarding the policy may be directed to the Office of the Academic Vice-President

Official E-mail

An official WJU e-mail is established for each registered student, each faculty member, and each staff member. All university communications sent via e-mail will be sent to this WJU e-mail address.

The Academic Resource Center:

The Academic Resource Center (ARC) is a totally free academic-support service available to all enrolled Wheeling Jesuit University students and staffed almost exclusively by WJU students recommended for employment by WJU faculty. The ARC is located in Bishop Hodges Library and is open five days a week:

Sundays 6:00-8:00 p.m.
Mondays-Thursdays 1:00-9:00 p.m.

Please visit the ARC's website (readily accessible on the Cardinal homepage under "Quick Links" or as the first listing under "Student Services") to learn about the ARC's services (emphasizing writing, math, and the sciences) and to schedule appointments.

Title IX Statement:

Wheeling Jesuit University seeks to provide an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have been the victim of sexual harassment, misconduct, or assault we encourage you to report this. If you report this to a faculty member, she or he must notify our college's Title IX coordinator about the basic facts of the incident (you may choose whether you or anyone involved is identified by name). For more information about your options at WJU, please go to <http://wju.edu/titleix/>.

Class Etiquette. You may use electronic devices for accessing assigned or recommended texts in this class. If you distract yourself or others, you may be asked to put the device away. Repeated distraction will cause you to forfeit the right to use any electronics in class.

Course Outline

Beginnings

- 1-7 Brief into to Religious Studies

- 1-9 The World of Late Antiquity (1)
P. Pachis, "General Characteristics of the Hellenistic Era"

- 1-11 The World of Late Antiquity (2)
P. Pachis, "General Characteristics of the Hellenistic Era"
LAST DAY FOR ADD/ DROP

- 1-14 Magic for Jews, Christians, and Pagans
N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 1-8

- 1-16 Concepts of Magic (1)
N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 9-26

- 1-18 Concepts of Magic (2)
N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 9-26

Dreams, Interpretation, and Divination

- 1-21 Dreams: Greco-Roman Perspectives
L. H. Martin, "Religion and Dream Theory in Late Antiquity"
Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, I 1-12 (pp. 47-63)

- 1-23 Dreams: Greco-Roman Perspectives (2)
Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, 2.49-65 (pp. 235-245)

1-25 Dreams: Rabbinic Perspectives (1)
Y. Harari, *Early Jewish Magic*, 431-445
b. *Ber. 55a-57a*

1-28 Dreams: Rabbinic Perspectives (2)
b. *Ber. 55a-57a*

1-30 Dreams: Christian Perspectives
Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 1

Ascent, Mysticism, and Praise

2-1 Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (1)
N. Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 63-71
Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (Wise, Abegg, Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 365-377)

2-4 Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (2)
Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, (Wise, Abegg, Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 365-377)

2-6 Revelation
Revelation 1, 4-5

2-8 R. Nehuniah's Ascent (1)
N. Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 71-81
Davila, *Hekhalot Literature*, §§94-106
Dream Paper Due by 11:59 PM

2-11 R. Nehuniah's Ascent (2)
Davila, *Hekhalot Literature*, §§107-121

2-13 R. Nehuniah's Ascent (3)
Davila, *Hekhalot Literature*, §§152-169

2-15 The "Mithras" Liturgy (1)
N. Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 81-84
PGM IV 475-820

2-18 The "Mithras" Liturgy (2)
PGM IV 475-820
H. D. Betz, "Introduction to the Greek Magical Papyri"

Demons, Exorcism, and Power

2-20 Exorcisms for Jews, Christians, and Pagans
N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 27-46

2-22 Tobit

- 2-25 Jesus and Exorcisms (1)
R. Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings*, 99-127
Mark 1.21-28; 5.1-20; 7.31-38; 8.22-26
- 2-28 Jesus and Exorcisms (2)
R. Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings*, 99-127
Mark 1.21-28; 5.1-20; 7.31-38; 8.22-26
- 3-1 Greco-Egyptian Exorcisms
PGM IV 1227-64, 3007-3086; PGM V 96-172; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, IV.9-10
Ascent Paper due by 11:59 PM

SPRING BREAK

- 3-11 NO CLASS
- 3-13 Rabbinic Views of Demons
Y. Harari, *Early Jewish Magic*, 386-407
- 3-15 Jewish Amulets
AMB, Amulets 1-3
- 3-18 Christian Amulets
ACM, 50, 61, 63, 64
- 3-20 Magic Bowls
AMB, Bowls 2, 13
- 3-22 Magic Bowls (2)
AMB, Bowls 6, 7, 9

Erotic Magic

- 3-25 Love Spells
N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 47-58
- 3-26 LAST DAY FOR WITHDRAWAL WITH A GRADE OF "W"
- 3-27 Greco-Egyptian Love Spells
PGM IV 296-466, 1390-1496, 1496-1595
- 3-29 Christian Love Spells
ACM, 73, 77, 78
- 4-1 A Jewish Love-Amulet
Or. 1080.15.81 (Schäfer and Shaked, 160-170)

Inspired Texts, Divination, and Memory

- 4-3 Greco-Egyptian Spells Quoting Homer
PGM IV.2145-2240; VII 1-148
- 4-5 Christian Spells Quoting Scripture
ACM, 9, 10, 21
- 4-8 A Jewish “Medical” Text Quoting Scripture
T.-S. K 1.28 (Schäfer and Shaked, 133-150)
- 4-10 *Sar Torah* (1)
Davila, *Hekhalot Literature*, §§281-294
- 4-12 *Sar-Torah* (2)
Davila, *Hekhalot Literature*, §§297-306
- 4-15 *Sar-Torah* (3)
Davila, *Hekhalot Literature*, §§307-314
- 4-17 Gender and Magic
N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 86-96

EASTER BREAK

- 4-24 Why Magic? Psychological Explanations
Freud, Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices
O’Keefe, *Stolen Lightning*, 464-468
- 4-26 Why Magic? Ritual Explanations

Final Paper Due Wednesday, May 1 at 1:30 PM