FYSEM-UA 715
Who Speaks for God? Prophecy and Kingship in Antiquity

New York University
Spring 2019
Mondays 3:30 PM - 6:00 PM
Location: TBA

Dr. Julie B. Deluty
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Office Hours: Monday 1-2pm and Tuesday 11-12am
King Juan Carlos Center, 53 Washington Square South, Room 507

Course Description
The human process of communication lies at the core of ancient Near Eastern, biblical and classical prophecy. From the construction of temples to the promise of military or diplomatic success, the utterance of the prophet and prophetess lends legitimacy to the king because the prophet speaks on behalf of a deity. This seminar will probe the scope of political authority in Mesopotamia, Ancient Israel, and Ancient Greece with a particular focus on the role of prophets and diviners in society. When do gods speak directly to humans via prophets, and when is a third-party human intermediary necessary to mediate between that prophet and the ruler? Through critical analysis of a spectrum of ancient sources from Mari (modern-day Syria), ancient Israel and Judah, and Delphi and Claros, we will investigate the system of mediation among prophets, intermediaries, and kings to undertake an interdisciplinary study of ancient prophecy. Communication across these three groups facilitates the transmission of the words of a deity to legitimize political governance and regulate human experience.

Required Course Books
Three required books can be purchased from the NYU bookstore or online. All other readings will be posted on NYU Classes.


Course Grading
Attendance and Participation 10%
1 Opinion Piece (2 pages) 10%
3 Short Analytic Papers (3 pages each) 45%
Oral Presentation 10%
Research Paper (10 pages) 25%
**Computer/Cell Phone Policy**
The use of technology in the classroom is strongly discouraged. If you must use a computer or any other device to take notes, please check with me first. No cell/smartphone usage in class is allowed whatsoever.

**Course Policies**

**Arrive on time and stay in class.** If you are consistently late or leave class repeatedly while it is in session, you will be marked absent. Class readings can be found in the course books and pdfs posted on NYU Classes. It is your responsibility to stay on top of the readings for each class date.

**Absences:** Two excused absences are allowed throughout the semester. Further absences will lower your final grade. Please plan accordingly if you know that you will be absent ahead of time.

**Late papers:** Late papers will be graded down as follows: Up to and including one week, one grade fraction (e.g. B to B-); more than one week, through the end of the term, one full grade (e.g. B to C). At the end of the semester, papers will be marked down one full grade for every day late, unless special arrangements have been made.

If you have any problems meeting deadlines, inform me as soon as you are aware of it. Special circumstances will be judged on an individual basis and not at the last minute. Emergencies that require extended periods away from school or missing tests should be referred to your Academic Advisor as soon as possible so that we can work out the best plan of action.

**Writing:** In this course you will be required to write 5 papers of different lengths. *Both* the content and the presentation (grammar, style, clarity, documentation) will determine your grade on essays. Papers should be typed in 12-inch font, Times New Roman, double-spaced with one-inch margins.

**Acts of Academic Dishonesty:** Plagiarism or cheating of any kind is unacceptable. If you plagiarize or otherwise cheat, you will receive an automatic zero for the assignment in question, and you will be referred to the Dean’s office. Second offenses will result in an F for the class.

**Disability Disclosure Statement:** Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd). Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.
Schedule of Classes

- **Monday, January 28:** *What is Prophecy? Why Should We Study Ancient Prophecy?*
  **Primary Texts:** Amos 5:21-24; Jeremiah 1

- **Monday, February 4:** *The Prophets and Kings of Mesopotamia*
  **Primary Texts:** Read letters #1, 6, 31 in *Prophets and Prophecy*
  As you read these letters, think about four categories: (1) the role of the named/unnamed prophet, (2) the process of transmission and the officials named, (3) the location where the prophecy occurs, and (4) the depiction of god(s) in the texts. What is the overall picture of prophecy that you get? Be prepared to discuss this question in class.
  - Charpin, Chapter 1 (pp. 11-58) in *Gods, Kings, and Merchants in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* (2015)

- **Monday, February 11:** *Entering the World of Temples and Sacrifice*
  **Primary Texts:** Read letters #10, 11, 12 in *Prophets and Prophecy*
  - Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, pp. 89-134

  Analytic Paper #1 Due Today (3 Pages):
  Compare the relationship between Nur-Sin and Addu of Aleppo (Letters #1 & 2), and David and Yahweh in 2 Samuel 7. How does Addu’s divine support for the king resemble the announcement of Yahweh’s support for David’s rule?

- **Monday, February 28—NO CLASSES (President’s Day)**

- **Monday, February 25:** *Gender and Politics in Mesopotamia*
  **Primary Texts:** Read letters #7, 14, 23, 24 in *Prophets and Prophecy*
  - Hamori, *Women’s Divination in Biblical Literature. Prophecy, Necromancy, and Other Arts of Knowledge*, pp. 3-40

- **Monday, March 4:** *Introduction to Biblical Prophecy*
  **Primary Texts:** 2 Kings 4; 2 Samuel 12:1-14; Jeremiah 31:2-14; Isaiah 15
  As you read the biblical passages, think about these questions: What do the figures portrayed in
these texts have in common? What is your definition of a “prophet” in ancient Israel?


- **Monday, March 11:** *Influence of Biblical Prophets on the Founding Fathers and on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*
  
  **Primary Texts:** Read Dr. King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

  - *The Biblical Heritage of American Democracy*, pp. 9-49

**Opinion Piece Due Today** (2 Pages):
Should Dr. King be considered a modern-day prophet? In what way does he resemble (or not resemble) characteristics of an ancient prophet?

- **Monday, March 18—NO CLASSES (Spring Break)**

- **Monday, March 25:** *Who are the Biblical Prophets?*
  
  **Primary Texts:** Read the books of Samuel and Kings, and the Deir ‘Alla inscription

As you read, make a list of the various prophets that appear in the texts. How does each prophet function in society vis-à-vis kings and common people? Is it similar or different from the prophets in the Mesopotamian letters? What would you include in a profile article about Elijah and Elisha? Describe their relationship with God.

- **Monday, April 1:** *What is a Prophetic Book?*
  
  **Primary Texts:** Read Isaiah 1-12 and Jeremiah 1-15

What is Isaiah’s attitude toward Jerusalem, the Davidic king, and the Assyrians? Is the repentance of the people possible?

Are Jeremiah’s concerns warranted? What is Jeremiah’s attitude regarding the temple in Jerusalem, Babylon and repentance?

**Analytic Writing #2 Due Today** (3 Pages):
Read Numbers 23-24 and the Deir ‘Alla inscription:
If you were making a film about the texts, who would you cast as Balaam? What would be essential to this character’s behavior? Explain your reasoning and argument based on both texts.

- **Monday, April 8:** *How To Do Research*

CLASS will be held in Bobst Library where we will meet with a reference librarian in preparation for final papers. Possible topics will be discussed with time for individual meetings.

**Research topics must be approved.**

**By April 13, all research paper topics should be submitted to me by email.**
• **Monday, April 15:** *Ancient Greek Sources*

**Primary Texts:** The Delphic oracle and oracles from Claros in Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives*, pp. 123-7; 130-7

- Michael Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* “Problems, Methods, and Sources” pp. 1-22; “Who is a Seer?” pp. 22-72

**By April 15, all research paper topics will be approved.**

• **Monday, April 22:** *Ancient Greece Continued*

**Primary Texts:** Plato’s *Apology*

What is the role of the oracle at Delphi in the *Apology*?

- Flower, Chapter 7, “The Art of the Consultation,” pp. 188-211
- Flower, Chapter 8, “Not Just a Man’s Profession: The Female Seer,” pp. 211-240

**Analytic Paper #3 Due Today** (3 Pages):
According to Jeremiah 23, what is a false prophet? What makes someone a true prophet? For Jeremiah, what does it mean to prophesy falsehood?

• **Monday, April 29:** *Writing Session and Connecting the Dots*

The first half of class will be devoted to in-class guided work on the final paper.


• **Monday, May 6:** *Comparative Prophecy: How Should We Compare the Sources?*


• **Monday, May 13:** *Oral Presentations about Individual Research Topics* (approx. 10 minutes each)

Students will present a synopsis of their research in class. This research may focus on a single text, a group of texts, a theme in the study of prophecy, or a topic of comparative scope.

*Research Papers will be due by email at the start of Finals week (TBA)* (10 pages).