Course Description:

This lecture course will introduce students to the two great non-Western civilizations of the Ancient Near East—Egypt and Mesopotamia, where writing began—and their significant impact on Israel, Greece, Rome, and, eventually, the West. The course will examine aspects of these two civilizations through readings in ancient texts which illustrate both the historical developments and culture of the age. Egypt and Mesopotamia will be compared and contrasted for developments such as urbanism and state formation, imperialism, religion, warfare, family life, trade and economy, kingship, the role of men and women, literature, cosmology, and art. Above all, the lectures will explore literature in the broadest sense, including documents which might otherwise be simply classed as historical. The lectures will be supplemented by section meetings devoted to exploration of the ancient texts. Slides will be used to present various aspects of art, geography, and society.

This course has two goals. The first and primary goal is to introduce you to ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia through contemporary texts in the hope that you will come to appreciate, in their distinctive voices, people and ideas which are both quite familiar and at the same time often quite alien to our world. The second objective is to train students to analyze various aspects of these texts and then to write down in clear, effective language your thoughts about and reactions to the material you have read. The ability to research, excerpt, analyze, and communicate well are essential skills that are fundamental to whatever interest or occupation you will pursue in life.

Course Requirements:

Writing projects:

a. Short paper (four pages) on the problems of reading and interpreting ancient texts – 15% of your grade.

b. Short paper (five pages) on comparison of cultural aspects or institutions of Egypt and Mesopotamia — 20% of your grade.

c. Final research paper (10 pages), presenting an interpretive, yet documented analysis of one of the weekly topics – 50% of your grade.

Participation in sections and class attendance:

A quick use of basic math skills will tell you that this aspect of the course counts for the remaining 15% of your final grade. The weekly recitation sections are designed to provide students with direction and analytical skills associated with the writing assignments. They are also intended to help students understand puzzling aspects of the ancient world which they may encounter in their readings. You are studying a world which is not as close to yours as it may seem at first glance. In order to help you understand the material, part of every recitation will be a one-page response paper related to one of the readings. You will be required to do ten (out of thirteen) of these papers for
the course. There will be a required visit—guided by the professor and preceptors—to
the Egyptian and Ancient Near Eastern collections of a local museum. The details will be
announced in class.

Failure to attend classes or recitations will considerably hinder your ability to
write your papers according to your instructors’ expectations. Your instructors (including
myself) are there to assist you—take advantage of their help. Attendance (and
timeliness) counts in both class and in the delivery of papers. In my years of experience,
I have found that students often disastrously underestimate how much time and effort
apparently simple tasks require in order to produce good results. If you think that these
are difficult requirements, wait until you have a boss!

Texts and Readings:

The lectures for the course have been arranged in pairs so that a subject, or a
group of related subjects, can be discussed each week. You will notice that the weekly
assignments have been divided into two main categories. Appearing first are “Ancient
Sources,” the focus of the course. These are selections from ancient texts which will
allow the ancients to speak on each week’s topic(s) in their own voices. Of course, many
of these texts will contain material which will relate to other subjects as well—The Code
of Hammurabi (Weeks 2 and 6) is not only an important example of ancient law (Week
12), it is also informative on the social stratification of Mesopotamian society (Week 2)
and the religious rationale for monarchy (Week 3). Similarly, the story of Gilgamesh is
relevant, at least in part, to about a third of the course. Many aspects of these
ancient sources need additional background readings in order to be fully appreciated and
understood. Accordingly, the course also has a number of “Background Readings,”
modern commentary on various topics mentioned in the original sources; these
assignments are also required, even though not every lecture has been supplemented by
background material. These articles will make it distinctly easier for students to
understand both the diction and subject matter of the ancient texts. The Background
Readings, furthermore, will be almost invaluable when writing papers. Neither the
Ancient Sources nor the Background Reading should be read simply for details, but
rather to inform oneself about an aspect of the Ancient Near East. This is not a “contents
course.” Although factual detail is important to your understanding of what you read,
you will not be called upon to remember the information. Queen Hatshepsut (Week 6)
conveys to you about the power of an Egyptian royal woman is the point of the
assignment, not the dates of her reign, not her lineage, not the name of her chief minister.
However, when producing a research paper, be sure to get your facts straight.

Now, for the second part of the syllabus, the “Additional Bibliography,” which is
available on the class website only. These references are, as their name implies,
additional material; they are not required, but I have provided them for those students
who may be particularly interested in a given subject. Following my practice of previous
years, I shall make these available in a box at the Kevorkian Library. Among other
things, these readings supply some historical background to the personages and events
you will encounter in the “Ancient Texts.” Of course, like the “Background Reading,”
these can be quite useful when writing papers, but don’t let “the tail wag the dog!”
Logistics and administration:

1. The professor: Prof. Ogden Goelet

   Office Kevorkian 305: 50 Washington Square South, corner of Washington Square South and Sullivan Street, entrance on Sullivan; third floor, end of the hall. Mailbox in Middle Eastern Studies Dept. office, second floor.
   E-mail: og1@nyu.edu (the most reliable way of contacting me)—Tel: 998-8894.
   If I am not in, please leave a message on the answering machine. Please leave your number s-l-o-w-l-y.
   No set office hours. Drop in after class, but it will always better to make an appointment first to be on the safe side; appointments readily made.

2. The Preceptors (Teaching Assistants):

   Ms. Debbie Vischak: dqv9386@nyu.edu
   Dr. Kathy Barbash: Katbarbash@hotmail.com

3. Class Web-site: http://homepages.nyu.edu/~og1/

   This course will make heavy use of electronic resources. We expect you to check the site before every class to keep abreast of assignments and various other course announcements. For instance, before every lecture notes for that class will be posted, providing students with a convenient means for following the lecture and learning difficult terms. From time to time messages will be sent out to the entire class by e-mail, so it is essential that you read your e-mail on a regular basis.

4. Grading

   The grading of papers will be a team effort, split between the professor and the preceptors, so that we each will have a feel for how individual students are performing by the end of the term. Any complaint about a grade should be brought to me; I am even open to suggestions about papers I have marked. However, I am normally not inclined to change grades, nor do I like the idea of a “redo” for a better mark, except in rare cases. I and the preceptors will nonetheless be willing to encourage students and show them how to improve their work. The assignments are not “do or die”—both I and the preceptors will be willing to read drafts, outlines, etc. for suggestions before final submission.

   Late work. May seem nice to you, but it is a real nuisance to the instructors. Accordingly, there shall be deductions for lateness.

   Short papers: the grade will be lowered a grade fraction for late papers turned in within one week of the assignment (e.g. A to A-, A- to B+, etc.). Short papers arriving more than one week will have the grade lowered a full letter grade (A to B, B+ to C+, etc.)

   Final papers: These must be completed on the due date. Papers received in the week following the due date and on the day on which I am obligated to turn in grades for the course will be lowered by one full letter grade. Special arrangements can be made, but only with the instructor’s approval.

   A final word on grades: Crises happen! (to euphemize the common expression). Tell me your problem as soon as possible and adjustments can be made. Exceptions can be made for good reasons, but I must hear the situation/explanation from you. I’m reasonable and can negotiate deals so that work can be turned in satisfactorily. But don’t come “out of the woodwork” at the last moment.
**Required Books:**

Most of the readings will be from the following six books. The course emphasis will fall more on literary rather than historical aspects of ancient Near Eastern writings, yet two books have been selected in order to supply the necessary historical and social background. Two works, marked with an asterisk, are optional, but might be particularly valuable for certain aspects of the course.


Lichtheim, M., *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, two vols. (Berkeley; University Press: 1973 and 1976) abbr. Lichtheim, *AEL I and II*. (Note: there is a third volume of this work, but this is not required for the course)


**Supplementary Readings from Ancient Sources:**

Each week we will examine a group of ancient texts related to the lecture topics. As explained above, these will be the focus of the course and provide the topics for the papers. Although the material itself is required reading, students are not required to purchase the books from which these texts are derived. (Considerable expense would otherwise be involved.) The primary sources for these readings will be:

Foster, B.R., *Before the Muses. An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, two vols. (Bethesda, MD; CDL Press: 1993); this is the unabridged version of the work from which *From Distant Days* was drawn.


**WEEK 1 (Lectures 1 and 2) – Ancient Sources** (Introduction to the ancient attitude towards their history):

**Lecture 1** *Introduction, Administration; Climate and Geography* (Sept. 4)
Introduction and administrative points: What are we studying and where is it? Was there an Ancient Near East?; The terms “Egypt,” “Mesopotamia,” “Ancient Near East” in this course; Where does the Biblical tradition fit into this course?; Climate and geography—the pros and cons of deterministic viewpoints.

**Background reading:**
Van De Mieroop, “Introductory Concerns,” Chap. 1 in HANE 1-16.

**Lecture 2** *A Sketch of ANE History, and the Ancients’ Attitude towards the Past* (Sept. 9)
Is there an “Ancient Near East”?; how we study and write about the Ancient Near East; the sources for this course; the king as the focal point of society; ethnic and national self-definitions.

**Background reading:**

**WEEK 2 (Lectures 3 and 4) – Ancient Sources** (Humanity’s place in the cosmos; The organization of society in the Ancient Near East):

**Lecture 3** *Classes, Society, and Economy* (Sept. 11)
Class structure in the Ancient Near East: the king and his family, the elite and the nobility, priests and merchants; the scribes and common people; slavery in the Ancient Near East; the occupational stratification of the common man; the scribe as our window.

**Background reading:**

**Lecture 4** *Introduction to the Ancient State* (Sept. 16)
The territorial state; the city state; the vassal state and the colony

**Background reading:**

**WEEK 3 (Lectures 5 and 6) – Ancient Sources** (The rationale for rule and the origin of the world order):

**Lecture 5 Rationale for Rule** (Sept. 18)
Egyptian world view and *Maat*; cosmological and political *Maat*; theories of rule in Mesopotamia; law, justice and fairness; royal power, *Maat*, and stasis

**Background reading:**

**Lecture 6 Myth, Cosmology, and Ancient Philosophical Thought** (Sept. 23)
Cosmologies and Philosophy in the ancient world; the birth of speculative philosophy; the creation of the world; the position of man and the earth in the Cosmos; conceptions of chaos.

**Background reading:**

**WEEK 4 (Lectures 7 and 8) – Ancient Sources** (Kingship, religion, and early urban society):

**Lecture 7 Kingship in Ancient Society** (Sept. 25)
A comparison of ancient religions with the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions; Types of Religion -- Divine and Royal, Funerary Religion, Popular Religion; The Gods and Humanity; “Church” and “State” in the ANE; The King’s religious role; The King as a God.

**Background reading:**

**Lecture 8 The Urban Setting** (Sept. 30)
The comparison of urban life in Mesopotamia and Egypt; Cities and commercial life

**Background reading:**

**WEEK 5 (Lectures 9 and 10) – Ancient Sources** (The elite in society: the king, the palace, and the temple):

**Lecture 9 The King in his Palace** (Oct. 2)
Mesopotamian kingship; the substitute king; the king and his family; Palaces and display; Egyptian kingship and the palace

**Background reading:**

**Lecture 10 The Temple in Society and the Economy** (Oct. 7)
The question of the temple as part of the state; Practical and mythic concerns in the design of temples.

**Background reading:**

**WEEK 6 (Lectures 11 and 12) – Ancient Sources** (The lower orders of society and the position of women):

**Lecture 11 The Life of the Farmer in Society and the Economy** (Oct. 9)
The civil status of the peasant; landlords – institutional and private; some comparisons between Egypt and Mesopotamia in agricultural methods and the peasantry’s status.

**Background reading:**

**Lecture 12 Women in Ancient Near Eastern Society** (Oct. 14)
The unusual power of women in a male-dominated society; Wives and daughters; Priestesses; Queens.

**Background reading:**

**WEEK 7 (Lectures 13 and 14) – Ancient Sources** (The life and times of the ancient scribe and the emergence of literature):

**Lecture 13 The Scribe in Ancient Near Eastern Society** (Oct. 16)
Literacy in the ancient world; scribal training; The scribe in Egypt and ANE; The question of patronage

**Background reading:**

Lecture 14 Literature 1 (Oct. 21)
On translating ancient languages—they don’t have a word for that; Languages and writing—a brief survey; The question of register; Towards a definition of literature; The genres of ancient literature; Biographical inscriptions as literature.

Background reading for Lectures 14 and 15:

WEEK 8 (Lectures 15 and 16) – Ancient Sources (The moral and instructional aspects of ancient literature):

Lecture 15 Literature 2 (Oct. 23)
The genres of ancient literature; The narrative tale; Brief remarks on Didactic Literature; Poetry and songs; Royal texts as a dominant type; Historical literature and how it relates to the Bible; Religious texts

Lecture 16 Didactic, Wisdom, and Moral Literature 1 - Moral Philosophy (Oct. 28)
The development of didactic literature; The importance of the scribe and bureaucracy; proper behavior; The relationship of didactic literature and the ideal biography.

Background reading:

WEEK 9 (Lectures 17 and 18) – Ancient Sources (More on ancient concepts of morality and their relationship with religion; Communication with those above, beyond and below):

Lecture 17 Didactic Wisdom, and Moral Literature 2 - Religious Concerns (Oct. 30)
The correct relationship between people, moral behavior and the Golden Rule; Is virtue its own reward?; Does fate have a role; fate and destiny; The relationship between god and man.

Lecture 18 Religion 2 - Communicating with the Other (Nov. 4)
Communication between humanity and the gods: Dreams, oracles, and miracles; Communication between the living and the dead; Prayers and hymns; public and private.

Background reading:

WEEK 10 (Lectures 19 and 20) – Ancient Sources (The practical aspects of religion in everyday life):
Lichtheim, “Three Penitential Hymns from Deir el-Medina,” AEL II 104-110; “Prayers used as School Texts,” AEL II 110-116; Pritchard, “Egyptian Rituals and

**Lecture 19 Religion 3 - The Practical Concerns of Religious Life** (Nov. 6)
Communication between man and god, the living and the dead; Cult and Religion; Temples; Offerings; Festivals and other celebrations; festival and myth; Personal and popular religion

**Background reading:**
Teeter, E., “Popular Worship in Ancient Egypt,” *KMT* (Summer 1993) 82-87.

**Lecture 20 “Magic” in the Ancient World** (Nov. 11)
Foretelling the future and divining the meaning of the past; Magic and mainstream religion.

**Background reading:**

**WEEK 11 (Lectures 21 and 22) – Ancient Sources** (Love, sex, and family):

**Lecture 21 Love, Sex, and Birth** (Nov. 13)
Love in Egypt and Mesopotamia; Sex for pleasure and sex for procreation; Coming into this world.

**Background reading:**

**Lecture 22 Childhood and Family Life** (Nov. 18)
Patriarchal and matriarchal modes of familial organization; The position of the family in society and in religion; The child in society and as an autonomous being

**Background reading:**

**WEEK 12 (Lectures 23 and 24) – Ancient Sources** (Death and the Afterlife; Law and Society):

**Lecture 23 Death and the Afterlife** (Nov. 20)
The Egyptian way of death; the cosmology of the afterworld; Class structure and the afterlife; The Mesopotamian view of the next world; Sin, Judgement, and Punishment—in this world and the next.

**Background reading:**

**Lecture 24 Law in the Ancient World** (Nov. 25)
Types of law; Decrees and the promulgation of law; Law as a confirmation of societal order; Criminal law, Civil law, Common law; Trials, Judgement, and Punishments

**WEEK 13 (Lectures 25 and 26) – Ancient Sources** (War, conquest, and imperial rule):

**Lecture 25 Warfare and Conquest (Nov. 27)**
The military, soldiers, and mercenaries in Ancient Egypt; The Mesopotamian military and way of warfare.

**Lecture 26 Diplomacy, Empires, and Vassals (Dec. 2)**
Equals, Overlords, and Vassals. Prestige and Interest; Letters, emissaries, and diplomacy; The Question of ‘Empire’ in the Ancient World.

**Background reading:**

**WEEK 14 (Lectures 27 and 28) – Ancient Sources** (Bureaucracy, economy, and trade):

**Lecture 27 Bureaucracy, administration, and economy (Dec. 4)**

**Background reading:**

**Lecture 28 Travel and Trade (Dec. 9)**
Rivers and caravan routes; Seafaring in the ancient world; Trade and exchange and their relation to the ancient economies

**Background reading:**
Astour, M.C., “Overland Trade Routes in Ancient Western Asia,” in *CANE* III 1401-1420.
Class Times and Room Assignments

Each section is an hour and 15 minutes):
V55.0501 001 Lec M W 9:30 206 Silver
V55.0501 002 Rct R 2:00 714 Silver (currently)
V55.0501 003 Rct R 3:30 Tisch UC58 (currently)
V55.0501 004 Rct F 9:30 25 W 4 C-11 (currently)
V55.0501 005 Rct F 11:00 48 CS 118 (currently)