

REL 343 | Sacred Flesh. Body, Salvation, and Sainthood in Antiquity: A Comparative

Approach

FALL 24

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Office hours: BY APPOINTMENT

Course Description

How was the physical body traditionally viewed and used in ancient Greek and Roman religion? How did the advent of Christianity change prevailing notions of the body? How can the body lead to salvation, a wonderful afterlife and possibly even sainthood? Under which circumstances is the body a hindrance to salvation? What if one aimed at perfection? How were ordinary early Christians advised to use the material body they carried? And the bodies and bodily remains of their holy figures? And their deceased loved ones?

Embodied religion has recently attracted the attention of both social history and theology along with the realisation that religious contents are dependent upon the material existence of human bodies. The body is recognized all the more as socially and culturally constructed. This course is for those interested in investigating how religion relates to bodies and sexualities and how bodies are ascribed religious meanings.

This course will mainly focus on ancient paganism and the early Christian Church (from the 7th cent BC until the 4th cent CE). Special emphasis will be given on eastern Christian monasticism. A comparison with other monotheistic religions, i.e. Judaism and Islam, will be ventured towards the end of the semester.

Course aims

This course aims to try to reconstruct the social meanings attached to the body in ancient Greek and Roman religion. Students will be invited to discuss the transition from polytheism to monotheism by mainly focusing on changing notions on the body and exploring how monotheism introduced the body and mind dichotomy in the ancient Mediterranean world. We will examine how ancient Greeks and Romans and a bit later early Christians assigned, read and projected moral meanings onto the body, and how these meanings got expounded in ethical expression as rules, norms and practices. Which were the boundaries paganism and early Christianity drew between what they considered to be appropriate and inappropriate use of the body? All of these topics will be approached through primarily textual sources, archaeological finds and ancient art, supplemented by secondary scholarship.

Course outcomes

Students will:

- gain a deeper understanding of studying religion as a human phenomenon,
- understand the connections between religion and the body,
- appreciate critically the influence of religious viewing of the body in shaping human experience,
- critically engage the various ways in which religion deeply intersect with human bodies and sexualities,
- engage with opposing views on a level that moves beyond superficial differences to differences of values and methodologies, and
- become familiar with major landmarks in the history of eastern Christian monasticism,

Course Requirements

You will be expected to attend all classes (unless prevented by illness), complete the assigned **readings before the class** under which they are listed, participate actively and constructively in discussion and be always ready to do the tests and pop quizzes (composed of fill-in-the-blank sentences, multiple choice questions and short answer questions) with closed books.

Additionally, you will be expected to compose **one paper**, 5-6 pages long, excluding bibliography. Your paper needs to be submitted at the latest **by 11 NOVEMBER**. Students are expected to arrange a meeting with the instructor prior to the submission of their papers in order to discuss the selection of topics. You will be called to **present your paper** in class. Discussion by the students attending the presentations is anticipated.

Students will be expected to submit their own reflection notes throughout the course (so as to develop written skills and simultaneously exercise critical thinking), evaluate orally as many primary sources as possible, gather and interpret research material, reflect critically on religious phenomena during hopefully passionate class discussion, work independently and collaboratively, taking into account current scholarship, worship and praxis. You are expected to **submit a one page reflection note** on 4 out of 6 of our on-site visits (**4 reflection notes in total**).

Grading and Evaluation

Your grade for this course will be based on the following distribution:

Participation 20%

One Paper 30%

Presentation of Paper 10%

Mid-term 10%

Reflection Notes 15%

Final Exam 15%

Attendance: Students are expected to report for classes promptly. CYA regards attendance in class and on-site as essential. CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential, so attendance at all scheduled meetings is required. All absences are recorded and have consequences that may affect your grade.

Your attendance and in class participation – is vitally important to your success in this course.

Please find detailed **rubrics** at the end of this syllabus.

You will have the opportunity to complete an **evaluation** form for my teaching methods at the end of the course. Should you experience any difficulties before this, please let me know. I promise I will do my best to help you during your studies in Athens. By all means do approach me, if you think I could be of any help!

CYA Policies and Regulations

Academic Accommodations

Students are required to submit an official letter from the office at their school that handles academic accommodations (generally the Office of Disability Services), or to have that office send a letter. Students who have submitted such a letter to CYA should also talk to their professors individually to discuss how these accommodations will work in each specific course.

Site Visits and Accessibility

This course contains specific physical and spatial elements that are crucial to student learning and which cannot be modified.

- This course requires that students walk occasionally; the walking is mostly on streets, sidewalks, uneven ground.
- This course meets occasionally in places where there is limited or no access to bathroom facilities.
- This course occasionally meets in spaces where there is significant background noise while the professor speaks.

ePolicy on Original Work

Plagiarism is literary theft. As such, it is a serious offense which will not be tolerated either at your home institution or at CYA. Plagiarism on an examination or in a paper will result in an F for the course. You must cite the author of any and all ideas that you use that are neither common knowledge nor your own idea. If you are in doubt, it is safest

to cite the source. Your work should be original and reflect your own ideas and thoughts. If you are unsure about what counts as original work, please consult your professor and check the Student Handbook.

Use of Laptops: In-class or on-site use of laptops and other devices is permitted if that facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended and will affect your grade in a negative way if they are not used for class-related work.

Upgrade to 400-level course

Courses can be upgraded to a 400-level. This constitutes usually 25% additional work on the part of the student. The option to upgrade opens the second week of classes. If you are interested in this option, please talk to your professor.

Required Reading

Textbook: a) Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988 and b) Peter Feldmeier, *The Christian Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

Please note: All required reading (apart from your textbook) can be found in Moodle.

You are strongly advised to consult the books and articles that are kept for you on the library’s reserved shelf.

Fall 2024 Schedule

Day #	Date/Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due / Place (if applicable)
	Sep 5-7	Field Study Delphi and Ancient Olympia
1	Sep 9	Session 1. Ancient Greek and Roman Religion How did ancient Greeks and Romans use their bodies to honor their gods and to ensure that their gods were content so that they would in return provide prosperity to humans? The importance of performing rituals to the pagan gods according to tradition. The consumption of sacrificial meat.
2	Sep 11	Session 2. The Emergence of a New Era. The Introduction of a New Teaching How did Christianity change the way deity was viewed in the ancient Mediterranean world? How were ordinary Christians, according to their religious leaders, to use their bodies in order to honor their God? Discussion on forbidden food and fasting. Required Reading: Textbook a): chapter 1 Body and Society p. 5-32 and Despina Iosif, ‘The present and future worlds are enemies to each other. Early Christian Aloofness and Participation in the Pagan World’, in Richard Alston, Onno M. van Nijf and Christina G. Williamson, eds., <i>Cults, Creeds and Identities in the Greek City after the Classical Age</i> , Peeters, Leuven, Paris, Walpole, 2013, 289-308.
3	Sep 16	Session 3. Visit to Agios Spyridon Church In antiquity many people sought healing for an illness in temples dedicated to god Asclepius. Where were people to turn for a cure according to early Christianity? Inside a typical Greek Orthodox church, we will discuss illness in antiquity, illness in early Christianity, and votive offerings of afflicted body parts in the pagan and in the early Christian world. Required Reading: Jan N. Bremmer, ‘How do we explain the quite demise of Graeco-Roman religion? An essay’, <i>Numen</i> 68, 2021, 230-271.
	Sep 18-21	Field Study Crete
4	Sep 23	Session 4. Gender and Carnal Desire in Paganism and in Early Christianity Submit reflection Did sexual life matter in antiquity, when it came to piety? Was it commonly believed that sexual choices influenced the way pagan gods saw humans and the fate of their souls in the afterlife? Was gender an obstacle to salvation? Could celibacy lead to spiritual power? Required Reading: Textbook a) chapter 15 p. 305-322, and D. Iosif, ‘Shut up woman! The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla and their Impact’, <i>Ancient World Magazine</i> , March 2021. https://www.ancientworldmagazine.com/articles/apocryphal-acts-paul-thecla/

Day #	Date/Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due / Place (if applicable)
5	Sep 25	<p>Session 5. How Is a Pious One to Feel? Emotions in Pagan and Early Christian Piety</p> <p>Fear was an important component of religious devotion in antiquity. The veneration of deities in the ancient pagan world was expected to affect not only the mind but also the physical body, to involve the senses and to install the emotion of fear in human hearts. What did 'fear of god' mean in the pagan world, and what did it mean in early Christianity?</p> <p>Required Reading: L. Feldt, "Total Devotion in the Ancient World: Emotions and Narrative in Radical Religion", <i>Religion</i> 53.1 (2023) 1-23 (available online for free).</p>
6	Sep 30	<p>Session 6. The Suffering Body, part one. Dying for the Faith</p> <p>Martyrdom is one of the highest Christian virtues. A martyr is an imitator of the suffering of Christ. Early Christian martyrdom made a genuine impression on pagans and led to innumerable conversions to the new religion. Why?</p> <p>Required Reading: Ferrero, Mario. "The Cult of Martyrs." <i>The Journal of Conflict Resolution</i> 57, no. 5 (2013): 881-904, Moss, Candida R. "The Discourse of Voluntary Martyrdom: Ancient and Modern." <i>Church History</i> 81, no. 3 (2012): 531-51, and Stroumsa, Guy G. "Sacrifice and martyrdom in the Roman empire." <i>Archivio Di Filosofia</i> 76, no. 1/2 (2008): 145-54.</p>
7	Oct 2	<p>Session 7. The Suffering Faith, part two. Mortifying one's Flesh out of Piety</p> <p>Discussion on early Christian asceticism and monasticism. 'Wretched is the body that is dependent upon a body', <i>Gospel of Thomas</i> 87; 'Pleasures are death-bringing', Cyprian, <i>On the Dress of Virgins</i> 21; 'Live as strangers to this world and citizens of heaven', Basil, <i>Epistula</i> 223.2. What is the meaning behind these quotes? Why shun earthly pleasures, flee from the world in order to seek constant solitary prayer and the antithesis of settled life? Did this idea exist in the pagan world before the advent of Christianity?</p> <p>Required Reading: Textbook a): chapter 11: The Desert fathers p. 213-240 and Textbook b): chapter 9.l.</p>
8	Oct 7	<p>Session 8. Meteora, Mt. Athos, St. Catharine's Monastery in Sinai</p> <p>In the north-west corner of the Thessalian plain are the towering rocks of the Meteora. On the three peninsulas of Chalkidiki, near Thessaloniki, is the monastic community of Mount Athos. Saint Catherine's monastery lies on the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt and is the oldest working Christian monastery in the world. What makes these places unique? Are all genders welcome to visit? How are visitors required to dress?</p> <p>Required Reading and viewing: Poulios, Ioannis. "Description of Meteora: Landscape, and History." In <i>The Past in the Present: A Living Heritage Approach - Meteora, Greece</i>, 33-38. Ubiquity Press, 2014. Ware, Kallistos. "Three Different Views of the Holy Mountain: Athos through the Eyes of F.W. Hasluck, R.M. Dawkins and Ph. Sherrard." <i>British School at Athens Studies</i> 17 (2009): 111-23. Watch the interview of Fr. Justin Sinaites, the librarian of the monastery at Holy Ground - St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai with Fr. Justin Sinaites - YouTube</p>
9	Oct 9	Session 9. MID-TERM EXAM
10	Oct 14	<p>Session 10. Visit to Moni Dafniou, a UNESCO site</p> <p>Chance to admire superb mosaics, dating from the end of the 11th century, a unique, fine example of the Classical idealism of Middle Byzantine art, and discuss how are the bodies of sacred figures presented in the monastery's mosaics.</p> <p>Required Reading: Andres Klostergaard Petersen, 'A new take on asceticism: asceticism as training and secession suspended between individuality and collectivity', <i>Numen</i> 66, 2019, 465-498.</p>
11	Oct 16	<p>Session 11. Visit to Moni Kaisarianis, a UNESCO site</p> <p>Chance to discuss monastic library collections and monastic bathhouses inside a 12th cent monastery.</p> <p>Required Reading: D. Iosif, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Illness as Demon Possession in the World of the First Christian Ascetics and Monks", <i>Mental Health, Religion and Culture, Routledge Journals</i> 14.4, April 2011, 323-340.</p>
12	Oct 21	<p>Session 12. Presentations of Student papers</p> <p>Submit reflection</p>
13	Oct 23	<p>Session 13. Presentations of Student papers</p> <p>Submit reflection</p>
	Oct 25-	Fall Break

Day #	Date/Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due / Place (if applicable)
	Nov 3	
14	Nov 4	Session 14. Visit to Agias Philothei's House Visit to the oldest surviving house in Athens (dating from the 16 th cent), where a Christian saint lived, who suffered martyrdom for a feminist cause. Required Reading: Angelos Chaniotis, "Too Shameless, Even for the Gutter!", <i>Eulimene</i> 21, 2020, 147-150.
15	Nov 6	Session 15. Presentations of Student Papers Submit reflection
16	Nov 11	Session 16. Presentations of Student Papers Time to submit your paper!
	Nov 12-15	Field Study Peloponnese
17	Nov 18	Session 17. Representations of the Divine Body in Pagan and Early Christian Art Which are the main characteristics of early Christian art? How is the body portrayed in early Christian art in the Mediterranean?
18	Nov 20	Session 18. Visit to the Byzantine Museum of Athens The Byzantine Museum of Athens has an amazing collection of typical and untypical Christian art. Which rules we discussed together in our ART session are followed, and which aren't?
19	Nov 25	Session 19. Purity and Pollution in Judaism, part one 'The divine law imposes no asceticism on us. It rather desires that we should keep the equilibrium and grant every mental and physical faculty its due, as much as it can bear, without overburdening one faculty at the expense of another', Judah Halevi, an important Jewish Spanish poet and philosopher declared in the 14 th cent. Is Judaism hostile to the early Christian ideal of lifelong ascetic renunciation? What about the Essenes? How is flesh (human and animal) to be approached, so as not to offend deity? Submit reflection
20	Nov 27	Session 20. Purity and Pollution in Judaism, second part Required Reading: Sarah Coakley, <i>Religion and the Body</i> , Cambridge University Press, 2000, chapter 5.
21	Dec 2	Session 21. Purity and Pollution in Islam, part one 'Die before you die!' is a famous Sufi exclamation. What is Sufism? Who are the whirling dervishes? How do Muslims use human and animal flesh to exhibit piety (and to unite with God)?
22	Dec 4	Session 22. Purity and Pollution in Islam, second part Required Reading: Read poetry by 9 th cent female Sufi Rabia al-Adawiya of Basra (on Moodle) and Sarah Coakley, <i>Religion and the Body</i> , chapter 15.
23	Dec 9	Session 23. Visit to Moni Agiou Ioannou Theologou Visit to a small 11 th century monastery in Papagos, Athens. Chance to interview nuns on their daily schedule.
24	Dec 11	Session 24. The Return of the Pagan Gods? View Student Visual Material during Study Abroad. Open Discussion. Submit reflection Greece is witnessing the revival of pagan gods. The adherents of the old gods, known as neo-pagans, are very few and generally ridiculed. How do they view the body? What do they do in their secret meetings inside ancient archaeological sites after hours? Plus, chance to share student photos and videos, relevant to this class, taken during the semester as a way to revise before the final. Open discussion.
FEW	Dec 16	Final Exam Week
FEW	Dec 18	Final Exam Week

Schedule at a glance

Day #	Date	Session	Venue
	Sep 5-7	Field Study	Delphi and Ancient Olympia
1	Sep 9	CLASS	
2	Sep 11	CLASS	
3	Sep 16	FIELD TRIP	
	Sep 18-21	Field Study	Crete
4	Sep 23	CLASS	
5	Sep 25	CLASS	
6	Sep 30	CLASS	
7	Oct 2	CLASS	
8	Oct 7	CLASS	
9	Oct 9	TEST	
10	Oct 14	FIELD TRIP	
11	Oct 16	FIELD TRIP	
12	Oct 21	Presentations	
13	Oct 23	Presentations	
	Oct 25-Nov 3	Fall Break	
14	Nov 4	FIELD TRIP	
15	Nov 6	Presentations	
16	Nov 11	Presentations	
	Nov 12-15	Field Study	Peloponnese
17	Nov 18	CLASS	
18	Nov 20	FIELD TRIP	
19	Nov 25	CLASS	
20	Nov 27	CLASS	
21	Dec 2	CLASS	
22	Dec 4	CLASS	
23	Dec 9	FIELD TRIP	
24	Dec 11	CLASS	
FEW	Dec 16	Final Exam Week	
FEW	Dec 18	Final Exam Week	

Participation:

CRITERION	25 points	20 points	10 points	5 points
Level Of Engagement In Class	Student proactively contributes to class by offering ideas and/or asks questions more than once per class and/or works consistently on group project the entire time.	Student proactively contributes to class by offering ideas and/or asks questions once per class and/or works on group project for most of the allotted time.	Student rarely contributes to class by offering ideas and asking questions and/or works on group project only some of the allotted time.	Student never contributes to class by offering ideas and asking questions and/or has trouble staying on task during group project time.
Listening Skills	Student always listens when others talk, both in groups and in class. And incorporates or builds off of the ideas of others.	Student usually listens when others talk, both in groups and in class and rarely incorporates or builds off of the ideas of others.	Student occasionally listens when others talk, both in groups.	Student often interrupts when others speak.
Behavior	Student never displays disruptive behavior during class.	Student very rarely displays disruptive behavior during class.	Student occasionally displays disruptive behavior during class.	Student almost always displays disruptive behavior during class.

Preparation	Student is almost always prepared for class with assignments and required class materials.	Student is usually prepared for class with assignments and required class materials.	Student is rarely prepared for class with assignments and required class materials.	Student is almost never prepared for class with assignments and required class material.
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Score	Total	Points	100
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Paper:

CRITERION	15 points	11 points	7 points	3 points
Introduction/ Thesis _____	exceptional introduction that grabs interest of reader and states topic. thesis is exceptionally clear, well-developed, and a definitive statement.	proficient introduction that is interesting and states topic. thesis is clear and arguable statement of position.	basic introduction that states topic but lacks interest. thesis is somewhat clear and arguable.	weak or no introduction of topic. paper's purpose is unclear/thesis is weak or missing.
Content knowledge: Quality of Research _____	paper is exceptionally researched, contains 3 peer reviewed articles, the 3 articles relate to the thesis argument in a logical manner. References are correctly cited	information relates to the main topic. Paper, is well-researched in detail and from 3 good sources. References are correctly cited	information relates to the main topic, but few details and/or examples are given. Shows a limited variety of sources. References are not cited correctly	information has little or nothing to do with the thesis. information has weak or no connection to the thesis. References are not cited correctly.
Content application: Support of Thesis and Analysis _____	exceptionally critical, relevant and consistent connections made between evidence and thesis. excellent analysis.	consistent connections made between evidence and thesis good analysis.	some connections made between evidence and thesis. some analysis.	limited or no connections made between evidence and thesis. lack of analysis.
Conclusion _____	excellent summary of thesis argument with concluding ideas that impact reader. introduces no new information.	good summary of topic with clear concluding ideas. introduces no new information.	basic summary of topic with some final concluding ideas. introduces no new information.	lack of conclusion.
Writing _____	Writing is clear and relevant, with no grammatical and/or spelling errors – polished and professional. Reference section properly formatted.	Most ideas are stated clearly and are related to the topic, with only minor grammatical and/or spelling errors. Reference section adequate.	Many ideas require clarification and/or are off-topic or have marginal relevance to the assignment. Many grammatical and/or spellings errors throughout the paper. The paper is very challenging to read due to poor writing flow. Improper reference section.	Paper does not meet the criteria for the assignment (too short or incomplete, too long, and/or completely off-topic). Reference section missing.
Score			Total Points	100

Reflection Notes:

CRITERION	Standard
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Responsiveness to Topic (20 points)	20 – clearly addresses the topic and responds effectively to all aspects of the assignment; 18 – clearly address the topic, but may respond to some aspects of the assignment more effectively than others 16 – addresses the topic, but may slight some aspects of the topic 14 – indicates confusion about the topic or neglects important aspects of the assignment 12 – suggests an inability to comprehend the assignment or to respond meaningfully to the topic		
Communication of Ideas (20 points)	20 – explores the issues showing thorough comprehension of the text; goes beyond the obvious class discussion 18 – shows some depth and complexity of thought 16 – may treat the topic simplistically or repetitively; doesn't demonstrate sufficient comprehension of the text 14 – lacks focus, demonstrates confused or simplistic thinking, or fails to communicate ideas 12 – is unfocused, illogical, incoherent or disorganized		
Organization (20 points)	20 – is coherently organized (i.e. stays on target with the topic), with ideas supported by apt reasons 18 – is well organized and developed with appropriate reasons and examples 16 – is adequately organized and developed, generally supporting ideas with reasons and examples 14 – is poorly organized and/or undeveloped; lacks support from the text 12 – is undeveloped; provides little or no relevant support		
Control of Mechanics, Sentence Structure, Grammar, Spelling (20 points)	20 – is generally free from errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure 18 – may have a few errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure 16 – may have some errors, but generally demonstrates control of mechanics, usage, and sentence structure 14 – is marred by an accumulation of errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure 12 – has serious and persistent errors in word choice, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure		
Score	Total	Points	100

Oral Presentation:

CRITERION		Points
Organization (15 points)	The type of presentation is appropriate for the topic and audience.	5
	Information is presented in a logical sequence.	5
	Presentation appropriately cites requisite number of references.	5
Content (45 points)	Introduction is attention-getting, lays out the problem well, and establishes a framework for the rest of the presentation.	5
	Technical terms are well-defined in language appropriate for the target audience.	5
	Presentation contains accurate information.	10
	Material included is relevant to the overall message/purpose.	10
	Appropriate amount of material is prepared, and points made reflect well their relative importance.	10
	There is an obvious conclusion summarizing the presentation.	5
Presentation (40 points)	Speaker maintains good eye contact with the audience and is appropriately animated (e.g., gestures, moving around, etc.).	5
	Speaker uses a clear, audible voice.	5
	Delivery is poised, controlled, and smooth.	5
	Good language skills and pronunciation are used.	5
	Visual aids are well prepared, informative, effective, and not distracting.	5
	Length of presentation is within the assigned time limits.	5
	Information was well communicated.	10
Score	Total Points	100