

**CLASSICS 201**  
**MAGIC AND MYSTERY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD**  
**FALL 2007**

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Office Hours: Monday 3:00-4:00, Tuesday 2:45-4:00, Thursday 11:00-12:00 and by appointment

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**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Meyer, Marvin M., ed. *Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999. (Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*)

Ogden, Daniel, ed. *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. (Ogden, MWG; note: *bold numbers indicate selection numbers, NOT page numbers*)

Apuleius. *The Golden Ass*. Translated by P.G. Walsh. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Books are available at the Oberlin College Bookstore. PDF files of readings and other course materials available on **BlackBoard**. Readings for the course will consist of translations of ancient sources; occasionally, scholarly articles will supplement work with the original sources. In each class meeting, we will discuss the assigned readings in order to evaluate and assess the day's topic. Please come prepared with questions about the readings as well as your own interpretations of the material.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course surveys the evidence for magic and the occult in antiquity, focusing on the traditions of ancient Greece and Rome. Topics covered include theoretical approaches to magic, practitioners (witches, sorcerers, and priests), magical objects (curse tablets, voodoo dolls, and amulets), magical words (spells and prayers), ancient mystery cults, and the interaction between early Christianity and magic. Special attention will be paid to how ancient individuals interacted with the unseen world in their daily lives, and when and how they employed the services of professional magicians.

The course adopts a historical framework for analyzing ancient magical and religious practices in order to understand how these traditions changed over time. The material covered in the course will include ancient literary texts, inscriptions, and artifacts. By analyzing these different classes of evidence, you will be able to gain a broader understanding of ancient ritual behavior within its cultural context and how cultural practices are reconstructed from limited source material.

## COURSE GOALS

This course is intended to assist students in achieving the following goals:

- Students should become familiar with the practices of magic and the rituals of the mystery religions during the historical period of classical antiquity (ca. 800 BCE – 500 CE).
- Students should understand the process by which ancient texts and artifacts are used to create a narrative about the past by learning how to critically read and interpret ancient sources in translation
- Students should understand how ancient magic and mystery cults fit into the larger cultural context of antiquity and how these rituals and actions changed over time.
- Students should improve their written communication skills by generating essays with a succinct and well supported thesis. Students will learn how to use ancient sources of evidence as well as secondary sources to make arguments about the past.

### Course Requirements

Paper 1 (1-2 pages):	10 %
Midterm Exam:	20 %
Abstract and Annotated Bibliography for Paper 2:	10 %
Paper 2 (5-7 pages):	20 %
Final:	25 %
Attendance and Participation:	15 %
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100 %</b>

*Papers:* Two papers will be required during the semester. Papers must be submitted via Blackboard as a Microsoft Word Document. If you use Word Perfect or another program, you must convert your paper to Word before submission. **All papers must be in Times New Roman 12 point font and have 1 inch margins on all sides.** The first paper is intended to be a brief (1-2 pages) discussion of a particular theme. In paper # 1, you will be asked to compare two literary depictions of witches. Details of this paper topic will be distributed on **September 18**; this paper will be due **October 4**.

The second paper will be longer (5-7 pages) and must be on a topic related to magic or mystery cults in antiquity. Suggestions for potential topics will be presented in class. This paper must include a thesis that is supported by both primary (ancient texts in translation) and secondary sources (modern scholarship). Books will be placed on the reserve at the library and you are encouraged to use these and additional sources. An abstract and annotated bibliography with at least three (3) sources will be due **November 6**. We will have a library session on **October 16** to explain how to compose abstracts and annotated bibliographies. Paper # 2 will be due **November 29**.

Late papers will be graded down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late (i.e. an 'A' paper becomes an 'A-' on the first day the paper is late, then a 'B+' on the second day, and so on).

*Midterm and Final:* The midterm will be given on **October 11**. This exam will cover material discussed in class up to and including the class on October 9. The final exam will be given at

**7:00 PM, Thursday December 20.** This exam will cover principally (but not exclusively) material discussed after the midterm.

*Attendance and Participation:* Class attendance and participation are necessary parts of the learning process. I will be taking attendance in class, and excessive absences will affect your final grade in the course. You are responsible for getting notes and determining what occurred during any missed class. In case of foreseen absences on exam dates, you must contact me well before the scheduled exam date and exams must be taken **BEFORE** the scheduled date and time. In case of unforeseen absences on test days, you will need to provide proof of illness or another justifiable reason for the missed class. **Due dates for papers are firm.**

*Discussion Board:* Your participation is based in part on your regular contribution to the class discussion board. It is my hope that interactions on the discussion board will help guide your reading of the source materials and will encourage lively in-class discussion of the readings. For each day's reading, I will post a question or two. Students should then post their responses to the questions or post new questions that are prompted by the readings. **Postings must be made at or before 12:30 PM on the class day.** I hope that you will use the discussion board as a chance to interact, and that you will reply to one another's posts. In class discussions will potentially build on postings to the discussion board, so it will be useful to check the discussion board before class. **Students are required to submit a thoughtful posting in a minimum of eight different boards over the course of the semester.**

*Honor Code:* The Oberlin College Honor Code can be found at <http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-reg.html#honor>. You will be expected to abide by the honor code for all written assignments. All work that is turned in should include the signed honor pledge "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment." Grades will not be recorded for work that lacks the honor pledge (though work will be corrected); students will be asked to resubmit such work with the signed honor pledge.

*Classroom and testing accommodations:* Students needing accommodation for tests or assignments (i.e., time and a half) should contact the Student Academics Services Office. Please contact this office (<http://www.oberlin.edu/learning/>) at the start of the semester to ensure that the appropriate documentation and classroom accommodation can be provided in a timely fashion. I would also encourage you to speak to me about the accommodation that is worked out with SAS; these discussions will be held in the strictest confidence.

*Changes to the Syllabus:* Minor changes may be made to the syllabus in the course of the semester. In this case, all students will be informed of these changes via email and through an announcement on BlackBoard. Significant changes to the syllabus (such as due dates) will be discussed and approved by the full class.

*E-Mail:* I will check email regularly. Please include the course name (CLAS 201: MAGIC AND MYSTERY) in the subject field of your email. All email correspondence will be conducted through your Oberlin account.

*Mobile Phones:* Please turn off phones during class. If a phone rings, there may be a pop quiz.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

*Readings are listed for the class in which they will be discussed.*

September 4: Introduction: What is Magic? What is a Mystery Religion?

September 6: Greek History (Reduced Version)

Readings: "An Outline History of Athens to the Death of Alexander the Great," (BB: Outline History - Greece); Odgen, MWG, Introduction. Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, Introduction, 1-14

September 11: Early Literary Traditions of Magic in Greece: Homer

Readings: Ogden MWG [*note: bold numbers indicate selection numbers, NOT page numbers*] **73, 74, 108, 120, 144, 248**; *Odyssey* Book X. (BB: Homer, *Odyssey* Book X)

September 13: Herodotus and the Magicians of the East

Readings: Ogden MWG **7, 10, 11, 13, 36-42, 44, 48, 49, 139.**

### \*\*\*\*\*Add/Drop Deadline\*\*\*\*\*

September 18: Witches in Greek Literature

Readings: Ogden MWG **52, 66-70, 76-89.**

**Paper # 1 Topic Assigned**

September 20: The Mysteries at Eleusis

Readings: Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 17-45.

**Print out and bring to class:** Eleusis\_Map.pdf (on BB)

September 25: Death, Ghosts, and Exorcism

Readings: Ogden MWG **25-31, 50, 51, 109-130, 133, 134, 137, 138.**

September 27: Necromancy

Readings: Ogden MWG **15, 46, 145-155, 157-160.**

October 2: Curse Tablets I

Readings: Ogden MWG **16, 168-171, 176-178.** Selections from Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (BB: "Gager - Curse Tablets I")

October 4: The Pythagoreans, Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abounouteichos

Readings: Ogden MWG **1-6, 57-63, 136.** Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* (BB: "Alexander the False Prophet")

### \*\*\*\*\*Submit Paper 1 by 11:59 PM October 4 via BlackBoard\*\*\*\*\*

October 9: Orphic and Bacchic Cults

Readings: Ogden MWG **14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 71**; Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 61-101

**Print out and bring to class:** Plan of the Villa of the Mysteries (on BB)

**October 11: Midterm Exam**

October 16: Library Session; Meet in Mudd Library

October 18: A Brief History of Rome

Readings: “The Idea of Rome” and “Rome’s New Kings” in *The World of Rome* (BB: “Brief History – Rome”)

**October 23: No Class, Fall Recess**

**October 25: No Class, Fall Recess**

October 30: Magic, Mysteries, and Roman Law

Ogden MWG **43, 45, 47, 126-127, 134, 158, 242, 258, 278-300**; Livy *History of Rome* XXXIX 8-19, (BB: “Livy Bacchanals”; please read Ogden MWG **282** in tandem with Livy)

November 1: Magna Mater and Attis

Readings: Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 111-154.

November 6: Curse Tablets Part II / Magical Gems

Readings: Ogden MWG **172, 174, 175, 179-188, 191-196**; Selections from Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (BB: “Gager – Curse Tablets II”)

**\*\*\*\*\*Last Day to declare P/NP, CR/NE, or to withdraw from class\*\*\*\*\***

**\*\*\*\*\*Submit Abstract and Annotated Bibliography for Paper 2 by 11:59 PM November 6 via BlackBoard\*\*\*\*\***

November 8: Magic in Latin Literature I

Readings: Ogden MWG **90-103, 106**. Apuleius, *Metamorphosis*, Books 1-2.

November 13: Magic in Latin Literature II

Apuleius, *Metamorphosis*. Book 3; Summary of Books 4-7 (available on BB: “Summary of Books 4-8”); Books 9-10.

November 15: Mysteries of Isis and Osiris

Readings: Apuleius, *Metamorphosis* Bk. 11. Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries* 157-174; 193-196.

November 20: Egyptian Magic and the Greek Magical Papyri (the *PGM*)

Readings: Ogden MWG **53-56, 131, 132, 156, 161-163, 166, 189, 190, 243, 245, 246**; *PGM* VII (BB: “PGM VII”)

November 22: No Class: Thanksgiving

November 27: Love Magic

Readings: Ogden MWG **197-235, 239, 240**. Selection from John Gager *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*; Matthew Dickie "Who Practiced Love Magic in Antiquity?" (BB: "Gager – Love Magic" + "Dickie – Who Practiced Love Magic")

November 29: Magical Gems and Amulets

Readings: Ogden MWG **248-277**

**\*\*\*\*\*Submit Research Paper by 11:59 PM November 29 via BlackBoard\*\*\*\*\***

December 4: Mithras

Readings: Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries* 197-221.

December 6: Elements of Mystery in Christianity and Judaism

Readings: Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries* 225-253.

December 11: Late Antique and Byzantine Magic

Readings: Ogden MWG 173; selections from John Gager *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*; selections from Naveh, Joseph and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*; selections from Meyer, Marvin and Richard Smith. *Ancient Christian Magic*. (BB: "Gager – Late Antique" + "Naveh – Amulets" + "Meyer – Ancient Christian Magic")

December 13: The Demonization of Magical Practice

Readings: Ogden MWG 65; Flint, V. "The Demonization of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity." (BB: "Flint – Demonization of Magic")

**THURSDAY December 20: Final Exam (7:00 PM)**