NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS (NELC)

* NELC 005a / HUMS 005a, The Ancient Egyptian Empire of the New Kingdom
For most of the duration of the New Kingdom (1550-1069 BCE), the ancient Egyptians were able to establish a vast empire and became one of the key powers within the Near East. This course is an introduction to the history, archaeology and literary sources of one of the most dynamic periods of ancient Egyptian history. We investigate the development of Egyptian foreign policies and military expansion, which affected parts of the Near East and Nubia to the south. We also examine and discuss topics such as ideology, imperial identity, political struggle and motivation for conquest and control of wider regions surrounding the Egyptian state as well as the relationship to other powers and their perspective on Egyptian rulers, as, for example, described in the famous Amarna letters, the world's earliest diplomatic correspondence. Throughout the semester, we consider the different sources that have survived in the archaeological and textual record for understanding Egypt's first empire within its ancient geopolitical context. All primary texts are read in translation. HU

* NELC 026a / ARCG 031a / EVST 030a, Origins of Civilization: Egypt and Mesopotamia
Harvey Weiss
The origins of the earliest civilizations in Mesopotamia and Egypt along the Nile and Tigris-Euphrates Rivers explored with archaeological, historical and environmental data for the origins of agriculture, the classes and hierarchies that marked earliest cities, states and empires, the innovative monumental architecture, writing, imperial expansion, and new national ideologies. How and why these civilizational processes occurred with the momentous societal collapses at periods of abrupt climate change. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program. HU

NELC 103a / LING 103a, Language Contact in the Ancient World
Chelsea Sanker
What languages were people using in our earliest written records? How were they written? What were people talking about in these texts? This course examines the languages of the ancient near east and other civilizations that they interacted with, from Greece to Egypt. Language contact is reflected both in ancient people's discussion of languages and use of translations, as well as in loanwords and other influences of languages on each other. Based on the written records, we also have information about other languages that were never written down, through names and other borrowed words. From the earliest tokens tracking trade commodities to epic poetry, these written records give us insights into the lives of people in the ancient world: The complaints of scribes in training, correspondences between kings, and dedications to gods. HU

* NELC 121b / HUMS 140b, The Hero in the Ancient Near East
Kathryn Slanski
Exploration of the interaction of religion, history, and literature in the ancient Near East through study of its heroes, including comparison with heroes, heroic narratives, and hero cults in the Bible and from classical Greece. WR, HU

* NELC 128a / HUMS 128a, From Gilgamesh to Persepolis: Introduction to Near Eastern Literatures
Kathryn Slanski
This lecture course is an introduction to Near Eastern civilization through its rich and diverse literary cultures. We read and discuss ancient works, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, Genesis, and “The Song of Songs,” medieval works, such as A Thousand and One Nights, selections from the Qur’an, and Shah-nameh: The Book of Kings, and modern works of Israeli, Turkish, and Iranian novelists and Palestinian poets. Students complement classroom studies with visits to the Yale Babylonian Collection and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, as well as with film screenings and guest speakers. Students also learn fundamentals of Near Eastern writing systems, and consider questions of tradition, transmission, and translation. All readings are in translation. WR, HU

* NELC 129a / AFST 128a / ARCG 128a / EGYP 128a / RLST 251a, Magic and Ritual in Ancient Egypt and the Near East
John Darnell
Introduction to ancient Egyptian magic and rituals with an overview on the use of magic and discussion of the different rituals and festivals attested in Ancient Egypt and the Near East. HU

* NELC 157b / JDST 306b / MMES 157b, Israeli Narratives
Shiri Goren
This course looks at contemporary representations of social, political, and domestic space in Israel through cultural production such as literature, visual work, and art. It focuses on close reading of major Israeli works in translation with attention to how their themes and forms relate to the Israeli condition. Reading and viewing include: Amos Oz’s major novel A Tale of Love and Darkness, Anne Frank: The Graphic Diary, Maya Arad’s novella “The Hebrew Teacher,” TV show Arab Labor and writing by Yehudah Amichai, Etgar Keret, and Sayed Kashua, among others. We discuss topics and theories of personal and collective identity formation, war and peace, ethnicity and race, migration, nationalism, and gender. No knowledge of Hebrew required. WR, HU TR

NELC 201b / ENGL 191b / HUMS 206b / LITR 318b / MMES 215b, The Arabian Nights, Then and Now
Robyn Creswell
Exploration of Arabian Nights, a classic of world literature. Topics include antecedents, themes and later prose, and graphic and film adaptations. HU

* NELC 225b / RLST 224b, Zoroastrianism
Kayla Dang
Surveys the history of Zoroastrianism, one of the world’s oldest continuous religious traditions, from its origins in the first millennia BC to the present day. Readings in primary sources in English translation and secondary readings in modern scholarship.

* NELC 231b / JDST 235b / MMES 235b / RLST 147b, Introduction to Judaism in the Ancient World: From Temple to Talmud
Steven Fraade
The emergence of classical Judaism in its historical setting. Jews and Hellenization; varieties of early Judaism; apocalyptic and postapocalyptic responses to suffering and catastrophe; worship and atonement without sacrificial cult; interpretations of scriptures;
law and life; the rabbi; the synagogue; faith in reason; Sabbath and festivals; history and its redemption. No prior background in Jewish history assumed. 

* NELC 242b / JDST 231b / RLST 416b, Aramaic Incantation Bowls from Sasanian Mesopotamia  

Staff  

This course is an introduction to the study of Aramaic Incantation Bowls designed for advanced undergraduate students. The course focuses especially on intersections with the Babylonian Talmud and other Jewish traditions, but we also consider the relevance of non-Jewish Mesopotamian sources (e.g. Mandaean, Syriac Christian, Zoroastrian, Manichaean, ancient Assyrian/Babylonian) and compare contemporaneous and diachronically stratified traditions throughout the Mediterranean, Near East, and Iranian Plateau. We consider the utility and drawbacks of different methodological approaches and explore relevant theoretical and pragmatic issues, including matters of textual transmission, orality and materiality, ritual practice, cosmology, communal identity and authority, gender and sexuality, and the interplay of religion, science, magic, medicine, and other aspects of culture in Late Antiquity. Prerequisite: Previous experience with Hebrew or Aramaic. 

HU

* NELC 250b, Assyria: The First Near Eastern Empire  

Eckart Frahm  

Survey of the history and culture of ancient Assyria, with a focus on its imperial phase in the first millennium B.C.E. Assyria’s aggressive foreign policy; the role of the military; Assyrian royal ideology, religion, literature, art, and court life; Assyria’s impact on the Bible; Assyria’s image in classical sources. Readings from primary sources in translation. 

HU

* NELC 311a / CLCV 219a / HIST 311a, Egypt of the Pharaohs  

Joseph Manning  

Egypt was among the first centralized territorial states in the world, and, because Egyptian history offers us 4000 years of institutional development and change, the focus of this course is on the long-term development of the ancient Egyptian state, its institutions, and its culture. The course introduces students to the history and culture of ancient Egypt from the rise of the central state to the early Christian period. General historical trends, the relationship of Egyptian history to other contemporary ancient cultures, and the legacy of Egypt to the “West” are also considered. At the end of the course, students have an understanding of the material culture and the historical development of ancient Egypt, and an appreciation for the relationship of the ancient sources to the construction of ancient Egyptian history. 

HU

* NELC 382b / JDST 392b / RLST 405b, Mishnah Seminar: Tractate Megillah  

Steven Fraade  

Study of rabbinic texts treating rules for the public recitation and translation of the Scroll of Esther on the holiday of Purim and of other sacred scriptures and translations throughout the year, with special attention to the relation between law and ritual and the narrativity of both. EMWAR area of concentration designations: STHJ, RabJud, ScrInterp. Prerequisite: reading fluency in ancient Hebrew. 

L5, HU

* NELC 471a, Directed Reading and Research  

John Darnell  

For students who wish to pursue a topic or body of texts not available in the department’s regular curriculum. Approval of the plan of study by both the director of undergraduate studies and a member of the department who agrees to serve as instructor is required. Student and instructor meet regularly throughout the term. The course culminates in either a piece of written work or a final examination. 

* NELC 473a / ANTH 473a / ARCG 473a / EVST 473a, Climate Change, Societal Collapse, and Resilience  

Harvey Weiss  

The coincidence of societal collapses throughout history with decadal and century-scale abrupt climate change events. Challenges to anthropological and historical paradigms of cultural adaptation and resilience. Examination of archaeological and historical records and high-resolution sets of paleoclimate proxies. 

HU, SO

* NELC 492a and NELC 493b, The Senior Essay  

Jonas Elbousty  

Preparation of a research paper of at least thirty pages (sixty pages for a two-term essay) under the supervision of a departmental faculty member, in accordance with the following schedule: (1) by the end of the second week of classes of the fall term, students meet with advisers to discuss the topic, approach, sources, and bibliography of the essay. Note: students planning to write the essay in the second term (NELC 493) should also meet with their prospective advisers by this deadline; (2) by the end of the fourth week of classes a prospectus with outline, including an annotated bibliography of materials in one or more Near Eastern languages and of secondary sources, is signed by the adviser and submitted to the director of undergraduate studies. The prospectus should indicate the formal title, scope, and focus of the essay, as well as the proposed research method, including detailed indications of the nature and extent of materials in a Near Eastern language that will be used; (3) at the end of the tenth week of classes (end of February for yearlong essays), a rough draft of the complete essay is submitted to the adviser; (4) two copies of the finished paper must be submitted to the director of undergraduate studies, Rm 314 HGS, by 4 p.m. on the last day of reading period. Failure to comply with the deadline will be penalized by a lower grade. Senior essays will be graded by departmental faculty unless, for exceptional reasons, different arrangements for an outside reader are made in advance with the director of undergraduate studies and the departmental adviser.