



Dumbarton Oaks



M.C. Carlos Museum



Fundación La Ruta Maya

ANTHROP 2RP3

RELIGION AND POWER IN THE PAST

Winter 2023

Course Description

Religion and power. In this course, we will explore the mutually constitutive relationship between these two dimensions of human societies. Using the archaeological record as a primary source and ritual activities as a guiding thread, we will examine the multiple ways in which religious beliefs, practices, and experiences have been shaped by and, in turn, have shaped power dynamics in the past.

Questions to be addressed include: How did power manifest itself in ritual practices, and under which forms? What roles did religion and spirituality play in shaping the identities, memories, and histories of persons, groups, and societies? How was religion used to legitimate, reinforce, or even resist and challenge dominant ideologies and power inequalities? And more.

To answer these questions, we will draw on case studies from various archaeological contexts and time periods, with a focus on Mesoamerica and North America. However, students will also be encouraged to explore the interplay of religion and power in other cultural areas of their choosing.

Location

LR Wilson Hall
LRW-1055

Schedule

Thursdays, 7 to 10 pm

Instructor

Dr. Céline Gillot

✉ gillotc@mcmaster.ca

Office hours

Thursdays 5 to 6:30 pm and
by appointment

Chester New Hall (CNH) 515

Course and Learning Objectives

This course aims to provide insight into the complex and multifaceted relationship between religion and power. Although you will learn about a variety of religious traditions, the course's objective is not to explain what religion "is" or to discuss the various forms it has taken throughout history. Instead, we will take a global perspective and use material evidence from the archaeological record to think about what religion "does" and how it has been embedded in other aspects of human experience, including identity affirmation, social interactions, and power struggles. You will become familiar with the basic theoretical knowledge and analytical tools used to reconstruct and explain past religious and spiritual life.

After completing this course, you should be able to achieve the following learning objectives:

- Identify past and contemporary approaches to the archaeological and anthropological study of religion and spirituality.
- Select appropriate theories and methods for detecting, describing, and interpreting material traces of religious and spiritual practices.
- Think critically about the multiple ways in which power may have been exercised, perpetuated, or contested through these practices.
- Discuss and demonstrate an understanding of the role played by religion as an empowering or disempowering process, both in the past and the present.

This course is also designed to provide you with the opportunity to continue developing your research, collaboration, communication, and creative skills.

Beyond the specific learning objectives mentioned above, you will improve your abilities to:

- Recognize, describe, document, and interpret objects, places, and other features of heritage value.
- Explore and use digital tools for project management and collaboration, idea generation, and data collection, organization, and visualization.
- Engage in team-based learning, work cooperatively on assigned tasks, cultivate an open-minded approach to diverse perspectives, including some that may differ from your own, and develop a sense of respect for peers' thinking.
- Communicate orally with confidence and participate actively in group activities.
- Use your creative mind and experiment with forms of composition that move beyond the traditional academic essay.

Tips for Success

- Attend classes and participate actively in class activities.
- Read this syllabus carefully and refer to it regularly for the course outline, readings, and assignments.
- Be prepared. Stay up to date with readings, complete your weekly assignments, and come ready for group activities and discussions.
- Ask! Anytime you have a question or need help - ask! **As your instructor, my top priority is to ensure that each of you has a positive learning experience and ample opportunity to succeed in this course.**

Class Format

This in-person course will combine formal lectures and active learning activities, so it is important to attend class regularly. Each week, the class will typically follow this pattern (with some exceptions): an approx. 45 minutes lecture followed by group activities and discussions.

The lecture will introduce the topic, provide essential background information, and facilitate subsequent activities and discussions by briefly reviewing the assigned readings, presenting related works or case studies, and suggesting possible questions and ideas to discuss.

In the second part of the class, you will work in small groups. Emphasis will be placed on active and collaborative learning, which means that you will learn and share your knowledge through discussions and hands-on activities with other students. **You are expected to** 1) come to class with ideas, reading notes, and examples that illustrate the topic under discussion; 2) engage actively in group works in ways that demonstrate an understanding of and a critical reflection on the key concepts and issues related to the topic. Furthermore, because one of the major assignments for this course is collaborative, your classmates will depend on your active participation and contribution to move forward and successfully complete their project. The final class session will be devoted to group project presentations.

Please note that your participation in class discussions and activities will constitute a substantial portion of your final grade (30%). Silence is said to be golden, but not in this course. If you feel uncomfortable speaking in front of your peers and/or need accommodations for in-class activities, please let me know early in the semester. We will work together to find alternatives.

Avenue to Learn (A2L)

A2L will be used as a repository for all course materials, assignment instructions, grades, and important announcements. If you are not already familiar with A2L, please start exploring it. You can find a helpful guide for students [here](#).

⇒ You will be responsible for checking the course page regularly. You can also [setup notifications](#) to receive announcements by email.

Communication

Remember that I'm here to help you succeed. If you have any questions or concerns, please email me or come talk to me during office hours. If you can't come to my regular office hours or need a longer time to talk, don't hesitate to ask for an appointment at a different time.

Please note that I will attempt to respond to your emails as soon as possible. If you don't hear back from me within 48 hours, feel free to email me again.

If you send an email, please include "ANTHROP 2RP3" in the subject line, and don't forget to sign your message with your name. If you prefer a name or a pronoun other than the one indicated/suggested on the course roster, please let me know.

Readings

Assigned readings

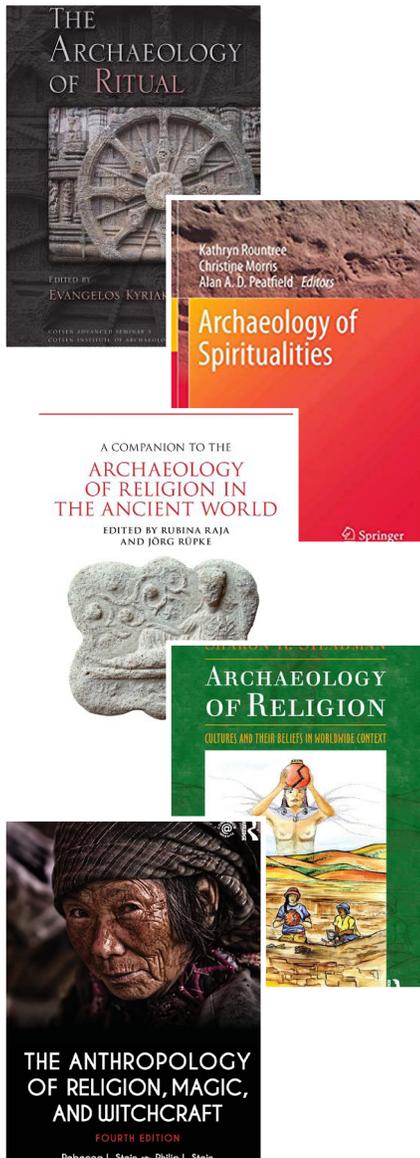
Most of the assigned readings will be book chapters and journal articles that I will post on A2L.

Once during the semester, you will also be responsible for choosing at least one additional research paper or another relevant source (e.g., a blog post, a podcast, a short video, or a piece of art) to share with your working group prior to class.

⇒ Refer to the section 'Participation' in the Course Requirements for further details.

Optional readings

The books listed below are not required but may help you understand the main topics covered in class or be useful if you want to delve more deeply into these topics.



Bell, Catherine M.

2009. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford University Press, New York.

Insoll, Timothy (ed.)

2011. *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*. Oxford handbooks. Oxford University Press, New York.

Kyriakidis, Evangelos (ed.)

2007. *The Archaeology of Ritual*. Cotsen Advanced Seminars 3. Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles.

Raja, Rubina, and Jörg Rüpke (eds)

2015. *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World*. John Wiley & Sons Inc., Chichester, West Sussex.

Rountree, Kathryn, Christine Morris, and Alan A.D. Peatfield (eds)

2012. *Archaeology of Spiritualities*. One World Archaeology. Springer, New York.

Steadman, Sharon R.

2009. *The Archaeology of Religion: Cultures and Their Beliefs in Worldwide Context*. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek.

Stein, Rebecca L., and Philip L. Stein

2011. *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft*. 3rd ed. Pearson Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River.

Course Requirements

One of the main objectives of this course is to encourage active learning and student cooperation. To this end, the class will be divided into small groups. This structure will allow for more interactive discussions, group exercises, and collaboration with your peers. By being actively involved in your own learning and working with your classmates, you will have the opportunity to deepen your understanding of the course material and develop important skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and creative collaboration. Furthermore, it is through this active learning and collaboration that you will be able to get the most out of this course and succeed in meeting the requirements outlined below.

Milanote

To facilitate active learning and collaboration, this course will use Milanote.

Milanote is an easy-to-use tool that will allow you not only to visually organize your reading notes, research materials, and ideas but also to share them and contribute to your group discussions and projects. It will be used for both individual and group assignments (see below). I will provide further details and instructions for accessing and setting up Milanote boards in class and on the A2L course webpage.

⇒ You will need to create a free Milanote account here: <https://milanote.com/register>.

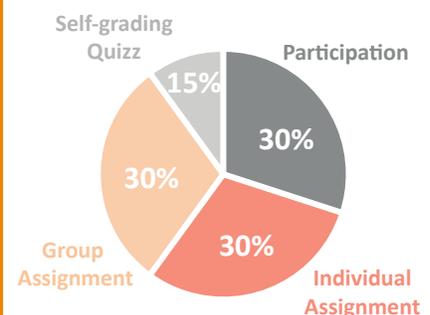
Class Participation (30%)

Because this class uses an active learning approach, attendance is essential. If you don't come to class, you can't participate in the learning activities and contribute to your group project. Your absence will not only negatively affect your participation grade but also impact your group mates. Please refer to the course policy below if you can't attend a class. If you were assigned to lead a discussion during this class, please inform me as soon as possible (preferably before the day of the class), so we can make adjustments.

All students are expected to participate actively in class activities and discussions. Active participation means: 1) coming to class prepared, with the required readings and assignments completed; 2) engaging in discussions, asking and answering questions; 3) sharing insights and collaborating with your classmates to complete group projects; and 4) actively listening and showing interest in and respect for other students' views.

Grade Breakdown

The course grade will be based on the following breakdown:



Please refer to the section 'Grades' in the Course Policies for the grading scale used in this course.

In the second week of class, you and your group will select a cultural area you want to learn more about. Each week, you will use Milanote boards to 1) post notes, comments, and questions that are related to the assigned readings and the weekly theme; and 2) post examples with explicit connections to the selected cultural area, describe them, and briefly explain how they relate to the topic discussed in class.

In addition, at least once during the semester, you will be responsible for 1) finding one or two additional articles or other relevant sources (e.g., blog posts, podcasts, short videos, or pieces of art) on the class topic – preferably, but not necessarily related to the chosen cultural area; 2) sharing this material with your working group the weekend before the class (e.g., if the class is on Thursday, Feb. 2d, links to additional readings are due by midnight on Sunday, Jan. 29th); 3) preparing and submitting a brief one-page outline of the main points and arguments developed by the author(s). Make sure that the selected readings or resources are electronically available and come ready to discuss them. You will be expected to lead a group discussion and provide a brief written summary of it (due on the next day on A2L).

⇒ Participation will be evaluated through attendance, contribution to class activities and discussions, and weekly assignments. Please note that part of your participation grade will be determined by the group's evaluation of your overall contribution and commitment to discussions and activities.

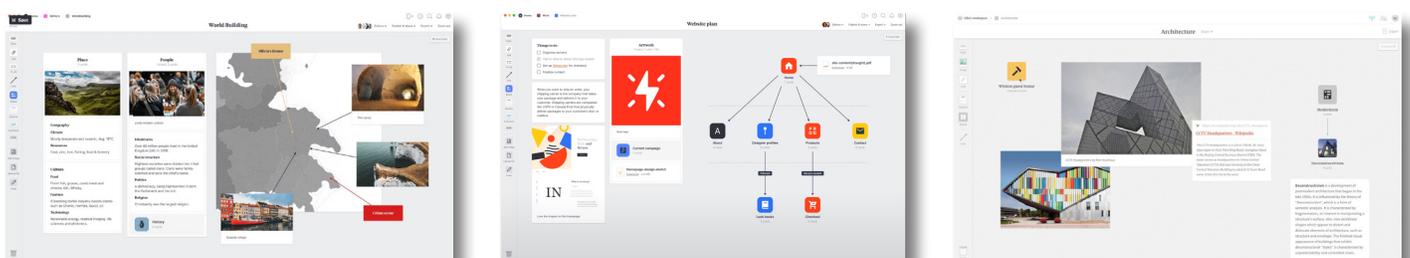
Individual Assignment – Digital Exhibition (30%)

For this assignment, you will create a small digital exhibition on a topic of your interest, either something that we will have already covered or will cover in class. You may use items from your Milanote board as a starting point or create a new collection of artifacts, monuments, buildings, or places. Your exhibition may combine pictures, drawings, maps, videos, audio recordings, and other materials. It should also include: 1) a title; 2) a brief introduction to provide more information about its theme and aims; 3) short descriptions of all the elements on display; 4) a conclusion or final reflection on the significance of these objects and the stories they tell; and 5) a list of the bibliographical references and other sources used to write these texts.

To complete this assignment, you can use Milanote and create a specific board or use any other tool you are familiar with. If you submit a document in a PDF format, you can upload it to A2L. If you use Milanote or another web-based tool, please send me an email with a link to your exhibition webpage.

⇒ This assignment will be assessed based on the quality of your research, the relevance of the material selected, the organization and presentation of the exhibition, and the clarity and accuracy of your writing.

⇒ Due dates: An exhibition proposal will be due on **February 2nd**, and the whole assignment on **March 2d**.



Group Assignment – Zine (30%)

For this assignment, you and your group will collaboratively create a zine on a theme related to the course content and the cultural area selected at the beginning of the semester. If you are not already familiar with zines, they are mini-, self-made magazines that can feature both written components and visual art like personal reflections, poems, comics, drawings, collages, etc. They can cover a wide range of topics and are often used as a tool to build communities of individuals with similar interests or to share perspectives that are left out of mainstream publications and media. We will devote time in class to talking about what zines are and how they can be produced.

Think of this assignment as an opportunity to use your imagination and express your creativity, share knowledge gained and ideas explored during group activities, experiment with different modes of communication, and have fun. After choosing a theme or topic, you will work with your group to design a draft, determine who makes what, and decide which format best suits your project. All the students will be responsible for creating their own written or visual content (one per student), citing the sources of information and/or inspiration used, and writing a short presentation of their work. You will have some in-class time to work together on your zine, but you may require additional time to assemble it, print or photocopy a few copies, and prepare an oral presentation of your project (10 min.).

⇒ Evaluation will take into consideration both individual and group efforts in planning, researching, producing, and presenting the zine. For this assignment, your classmates will also evaluate the quality of your work (i.e., the zine and the presentation).

⇒ Due dates: An outline of your zine project and plan of execution will be due on **March 9th**, your individual contribution on **March 23rd**, and the completed zine on **March 30th**. Presentations will be given during the final class meeting.

Self-Evaluation Quiz (10%) and Bonus Opportunity (5%)

By the end of the course, you will complete a short self-assessment quiz that will help me determine if you have met the learning objectives set for this course.

At the end of this quiz, there will also be an opportunity to earn extra credit. You will receive this credit if you provide a short description of either 1) a museum exhibition that you have visited (in person or online) or 2) a zine that you have read and liked, or 3) a ritual event that you have attended during the semester. You will have to briefly explain how this exhibition/zine/event deepened your understanding of the course content or how the content of the course deepened your understanding of this exhibition/zine/event.

For all requirements

I will provide more information on these assignments during the first class and post them on the A2L course webpage.

Course Schedule

This is a tentative course schedule. The flow of topics might change slightly depending on class progress and other factors.

⇒ However, the ***deadlines** for the major assignments will not change.

Assigned readings and weekly assignments will be announced each week in class and posted on A2L at the beginning of each module.

MODULE I – Religion and Power in the Past: Introduction

Week 1	Jan. 12	Course Overview and Syllabus Review	
Week 2	Jan. 19	Archaeological and Anthropological Perspectives	Weekly Ass. #1
Week 3	Jan. 26	Religion and Power: Key Concepts	Weekly Ass. #2

MODULE II – Ritual performers: Human and More-than-Human Actors

Week 4	Feb. 2	From Shamans and Witches to Priests and Divine Kings	Weekly Ass. #3 *Exhibition Proposal
Week 5	Feb. 9	Bodies for Power and Power of Bodies	Weekly Ass. #4
Week 6	Feb. 16	Spirit Animals and Sacred Plants	Weekly Ass. #5
Week 7	Feb. 23	Mid-term recess. No Class!	
Week 8	Mar. 2	Vibrant Matters and Magic Substances	Weekly Ass. #6 *Digital Exhibition
Week 9	Mar. 9	Animated Things and Powerful Objects	Weekly Ass. #7 * Zine Proposal

MODULE III - Ritual performances: Empowerment and Disempowerment

	Mar. 16	Land Connections and Monumental Creations	Weekly Ass. #8
Week 11	Mar. 23	Crafting, Remembering, and Healing	*Zine Contribution
Week 12	Mar. 30	Pilgrimages and Spiritual Quests	*Zine
Week 13	Apr. 6	Group Project Presentations	

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

Assignments should be submitted electronically by uploading them to Milanote boards and/or to the Assignments folder on the A2L course webpage. Please refer to the description of each assignment for more details.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

90-100 A+	77-79 B+	67-69 C+	57-59 D+	0-49 F
85-90 A	73-76 B	63-66 C	53-56 D	
80-84 A-	70-72 B-	60-62 C-	50-52 D-	

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

The best strategy for success in this course is regular attendance. If you can't attend a class, or if you must arrive late or leave early, please email me before class. Absence from one class will be excused, and absence from two classes will be tolerated. Missing more than two classes will result in a significant reduction in your participation grade.

If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to follow up with course notes, assignments, and course-related announcements. Visit the A2L course webpage, and make sure there is someone from whom you can borrow notes.

Late Assignments

In fairness to everyone, all assignments must be submitted by the specified due date.

Late work will be only accepted for the two major assignments (i.e., the digital exhibition and the zine projects). After a 24 hours grace period, late submissions will result in a deduction of 2% per day (including weekends). Any extension will require extenuating circumstances, and you are expected to communicate with me before the deadline.

Avenue to Learn & Milanote

In this course, we will be using Avenue to Learn and Milanote. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster email accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

ADVISORY STATEMENTS

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

ONLINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**. It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK

McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”: <https://academiccalendars.romcmaster.ca/content.php?catoid=44&navoid=9020#requests-for-relief-for-missed-academic-term-work>

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar’s Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors. The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.