

David Ulansey 3 Units

Spring 2006

PARP 6780 From Gilgamesh to Gnosis: The Archetypal
Structure of Western Religion

This course will explore the mythic, symbolic, and archetypal patterns that lie at the heart of Western religion. The course will center on the ancient foundation myths of Western religion, and its goal will be to discover the ways in which an understanding of the origins and nature of these myths can help us clarify our own archetypal situation today. We will begin by tracing the earliest Mesopotamian roots of the symbolic systems of the West. We will then examine the structure of the core myths of the ancient Israelites as preserved in the anthology of texts known as the "Old Testament." The course will continue by investigating the merger of archetypal complexes-- including ancient Near Eastern ritual and myth, Israelite apocalyptic speculation, and Greek mysticism and cosmology-- that created the symbolic matrix out of which the Christian movement emerged. The early Christian "Gospels" will then be explored to see how elaborate layers of deep mythic imagery gradually became woven around the historical figure of Jesus. The course will conclude with an analysis of the fully developed "Christ-Myth" (combining the motif of the ancient dying and rising god with that of the cosmic descending and ascending redeemer) as found in sources ranging from the visionary mythmaker Paul to various Gnostic traditions.

Course Requirements:

- (1) Active participation in class discussions.
- (2) Either:
 - (a) Final research paper, 15-20 pages, or
 - (b) Take-home final exam essay, due at the last class,

The New Jerusalem Bible (Reader's Edition)
Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return
N.K. Sandars, The Epic of Gilgamesh
N.K. Sandars, Poems of Heaven and Hell from Ancient
Mesopotamia
Plato, The Last Days of Socrates
John Hayes, Introduction to the Bible

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND SYLLABUS

WEEK	TOPICS/ASSIGNMENTS
1.	Introduction
2.	Myth and History Eliade, Myth of the Eternal Return, chaps. 1-2.
3.	The Matrix of Mesopotamian Myth Sandars, The Epic of Gilgamesh "The Babylonian Creation" and "The Descent of Inanna to Hell" in Sandars, Poems of Heaven and Hell From Ancient Mesopotamia
5.	The Birth of "Israel" Genesis Exodus Deuteronomy 26:1-10 The Legend of Sargon (xerox)
6.	Prophets and Kings I Samuel I- II Samuel 8 I Kings 1-7 I Kings 14- II Kings 6 Isaiah 1-12, 52:13- 53:12 Ezekiel 1
7.	The Hellenistic Revolution Hesiod, Theogony (xerox) Plato, Phaedo, in Last Days of Socrates Apuleius, Metamorphoses, Book 11 (xerox)
8.	Apocalyptic Visions Daniel: 7-12 Apocalyptic selections (xerox)
9.	The Jesus Movement Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke Acts 1-5 Norman Perrin, "A History of New Testament Christianity" (xerox)
10.	The Historical Jesus? Gospel of Mark (re-read) "Q" (xerox) Gospel of Thomas (xerox)

11. From the Jesus Movement to the Christ Cult
Acts 6-19
Alexander the Quack Prophet (xerox)
12. Paul and the Christ Myth
I Corinthians
II Corinthians
Galatians
Philippians
(Re-read Perrin, "A History of New Testament
Christianity")
13. The Descending and Ascending Redeemer
Gospel of John
Hymn of the Pearl (xerox)
14. Varieties of Early Christianity
Valentinian Gnostic System According to
Ptolemaeus (xerox)
I and II Timothy, Titus
15. Conclusion