RLG 322H1F Gospels and Ancient Biography
Fall 2019 · Wednesday 10:00-12:00 · Room: AB114
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Description
This course examines gospels and other early Christian literature in the context of ancient biographical literature. The course will compare literary features (sources, compositional techniques, narrative themes, redaction procedures) of the gospels to biographies of other ancient Mediterranean figures.

Prerequisite: RLG241Y1/RLG241H1S

Course Objectives
The objectives of this course are the following:
- Recognize the forms and features of ancient biography.
- Understand the gospels in their Greco-Roman literary context.
- Critically analyze primary sources from the ancient Mediterranean.
- Weigh and evaluate evidence and academic arguments.
- Effectively communicate verbally and in writing primary source evidence and academic arguments.

Evaluation

20% Preparation and Participation: This course will include tutorial-style discussions on select days (see Course Outline). On these days, groups of students will be responsible for presenting the readings and facilitating discussion. Other students will be expected to have command of the readings and be prepared with one or two specific questions or comments that arose.

40% Four (4) Short written assignments: Due dates for these assignments are listed in the outline. Each assignment will come with primary and secondary readings. These are low stakes assignments meant to facilitate close reading of primary sources with support from a small number of secondary readings. Please do not consult other literature or commentaries.

40% Research Paper 10-15 pages: Due Thurs, December 19. Any topic discussed in the course may be chosen, or another topic, with instructor permission. Papers may be written in either SBL or Chicago style.

Writing Resources
Writing clear, coherent essays is an important skill for Humanities majors and undergraduate education in general. The University of Toronto has numerous resources to assist all students with any of their writing needs. Students in this course are encouraged to think early and often about how to develop their writing skills to produce a strong final paper. Scheduling a visit with a Writing Centre in Arts and Science is an invaluable way to improve one’s writing. See the link for centres at St. George and other writing resources provided by Arts and Sciences. [https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science/](https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science/)
Readings
Articles and book chapters will be provided on Blackboard. Many are also available online through the library. For biblical material, NRSV translation must be used. Other ancient materials are available online or will provided on Blackboard.

**Readings are meant to be completed for the day upon which they are listed e.g. you should have read Burridge for the first class.**

Outline

1) **Sept. 11** What is a Biography?

2) **Sept. 18** Features of Ancient Biography and **Discussion**

3) **Sept. 25** Gospel of Luke and Bioi
      [https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/x/xenophon/x5ag/index.html#section1](https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/x/xenophon/x5ag/index.html#section1)

4) **Oct. 2** Gospels and Bioi and **Discussion**
   c. Lucian of Samosata, *Alexander of Abonoteichos* 1-17, 22-24, 59-61
   d. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.1-12, 19; 4.1-3, 45-47

5) **Oct. 9** Relationship between the Gospels: The Synoptic Problem

**Assignment 1** due: 3-4 page response paper comparing biographic features of Matthew and Luke with those in Philostratus, Plutarch or Xenophon. Consult Martin for biographical template.
6) Oct. 16 Source Usage in Ancient Literature: Synoptics and Josephus and Discussion
   b. 1 Samuel 31:1-7; Josephus, Ant. 6.368-73; 1 Chronicles 10:1-5
   c. Josephus, Ant. 3.91; Exodus 20: 2-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-22

7) Oct. 23 Ancient Media: Writing and Its Discontents
   e. Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 6 (Life of Origen)

8) Oct. 30 Alexander the Great: Romance and Biography and Discussion
   c. Plutarch, Life of Alexander 1.1-8.5 (refresh)

   *Reading week Nov. 4-8*

9) Nov. 13 Paul and Thecla: Novels and Biography and Discussion
   a. Acts of Paul and Thecla

   Assignment 2 due: Discuss the tendency in early Christianity to portray themselves as ‘literate’ or ‘bookish.’ How did this tendency play out in literature? What kind of trends can be identified? Discuss the contrast between illiterate apostles and literate heroes (Jesus, Paul).

10) Nov. 20 Histories- Herodotus, Thucydides and Reliability and Discussion
    c. Herodotus Histories, 1-3
    d. Pliny the Younger, Ep. 8.4

   Assignment 3 due: Discuss the Acts of Paul and Thecla as an ancient novel. What features can be identified to fit this genre? How does APT appear like a biography? What are the gender dynamics in the work? Consult Week 9 literature.
11) **Nov. 27** Inscriptions: Monumental Biography and Public life and Discussion
   a. Vita Aberci

**Assignment 4:** Using your knowledge of the ancient biographical genre, construct a fictitious biography that includes the features of ancient biography studied throughout the course. (3-4 pages)

12) **Dec 4** Death of the Hero: True Character Revealed

**Final Paper:** (10-15 pages) Topics Suggestions:
1) A close comparison of source usage between the Synoptic gospels and other biographical material.
2) A discussion of the merits or shortcomings of any Synoptic problem theory.
4) The relationship between inscriptions and biographical narratives.
5) Discussion of death in ancient biography.

**Any additional topic may be suggested in consultation with instructor.**