

Attention!

This is a representative syllabus.
The syllabus for the course you are
enrolled in will likely be different.

Please refer to your instructor's
syllabus for more information on
specific requirements for a given
semester.

Ancient Empires

NELC 3111

The History and Cultures of the Empires
of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Armenia, and Afghanistan
from Cyrus to Muhammad



Professor

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Office hours

GTA:

GE Credit and Learning Goals

This course fulfills the **GE Historical Study** category. Expected learning outcomes:

1. Students develop an integrated perspective on history and the factors that shape human activity.
2. Students describe and analyze the origins and nature of contemporary issues.
3. Students speak and write critically about primary and secondary historical sources by examining diverse interpretations of past events and ideas in their historical contexts.

Students will learn fundamental elements of historical sociology to classify and organize information about the earliest territorially extensive ancient states and the peoples they governed. Readings include both primary sources in translation from a variety of ancient languages and non-textual material remains seen in photographs, all analyzed in class and in secondary readings. Sources will be studied and discussed according to their genre and their transmission, survival, or recovery. Many of the events covered in this course contributed decisively to the demography of the present-day Near East and the social characteristics of its people, from the distribution of language communities to the variety of Near Eastern religions. Students will consider modern manifestations of and parallels to the ancient phenomena studied in this class and reflect on the means and motives for modern persons to identify themselves with ancient social groups. A pervasive question in this course is how we today know about the past and how we interpret it. Students will compose papers and participate in discussions to practice historically informed critical thinking, having studied ample primary materials, and employ methods for interpreting them.

Course Description

This is an introduction to the history and cultures of the ancient empires of southwestern Asia, focusing on the period from the Assyrian and Persian Empires to the establishment of Islam (ca 900 BCE–ca 750 CE). Students will learn how to use ancient primary sources critically to create a historical narrative and to understand the modern appropriation of ancient history for political and other purposes.

Major topics include the formation of early states, the kingdoms of Mesopotamia, Anshan and the Elamites, the Achaemenid dynasty, Alexander and his successors, the Parthian and Sasanian Persian empires and their rivalries with Rome, as well as the empires of Afghanistan and the kingdom of Armenia. The course will include an introduction to the geography of southwestern Asia and a survey of languages, Iranian and other religions, and some ancient literature from a variety of cultures. Extensive readings of primary sources will include classical Greek and Latin authors, as well as works composed in Iran, from royal inscriptions to neighboring Armenian and Aramaic sources chronicling war and strife. Finally we will explain how the population of Iran and its neighbors became predominantly Muslim. Two major themes will be the nature of empires and the use and interpretation of primary written materials to reconstruct past cultures.

Required Course Books

1. Curtis, J.E., and N. Tallis, *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia*, University of California Press / British Museum Press 2005.
2. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield, Oxford 1998.
3. Xenophon, *The Persian Expedition*, trans. Rex Warner, Penguin 1950.
4. Dignas, Beate, and Engelbert Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals*, Cambridge University Press 2007.

Readings available on the course Carmen/Canvas site

1. Grayson, A. Kirk, "Assyrian Rule of Conquered Territory in Ancient Western Asia," in Jack Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, Scribner 1995, vol. 2, pp. 959–968.
2. "Conquering and Ruling Pre-Modern Afghanistan," excerpt of Chapter 2 of Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, Princeton University Press, 2010, pp. 66–90.

3. “An Incidental Annexation” and “Rome, Syria, Parthians and Persians,” from Kevin Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, Getty Publications/British Museum Press 2003, pp. 19–60.
4. *2 Maccabees* (excerpted from New Oxford Annotated Bible 2nd ed., revised, Oxford University Press 1991, pp. 228–258).
5. Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire: A.D. 354–378*, trans. Walter Hamilton, pp. 148–175.
6. Procopius, *The Wars*, Book 1, chapters xiii–iv (pp. 103–129, odd pages only), trans. H. B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library 1915.
7. Patricia Crone, “The Early Islamic World,” in *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, eds. Kurt Raaflaub and N. Lowenstein, Harvard University Press 1999, pp. 309–32.
8. *The History of Lazar P’arpec’i*, trans. Robert Thomson, Scholars Press 1991, pp. 75–157.
9. *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, trans. by F. Trombley and J. Watt 2001.

Online Resources

- Encyclopaedia Iranica online: www.iranicaonline.org [Containing articles on almost every subject we will touch on in the class. The website gives free access to the online version of the most important reference work on Iran ever compiled—paper version into the letter K as of this time.]
- www.avesta.org [archive of Old and Middle Iranian texts relevant to Zoroastrianism]
- www.livius.org/persia.html [a sort of mini-encyclopaedia of ancient Iran]

Course Opportunities and Grading

The only absolute requirement for this course is that you take the final exam, *although that is not in itself sufficient to pass the course* because alone it confers at most 20 points. All other tasks are optional. You may choose to do any combination of them, doing all or only some of the tasks, to earn the grade you want. Final grades are assigned on the following point scale:

A = 93 or higher, A- = 90–92, B+ = 87–89, B = 83–86, B- = 80–82, C+ = 77–79, C = 73–76, C- = 70–72, D+ = 67–69, D = 60–66, E = 0–59

The opportunities to earn points contributing toward your point total are listed below. Select the tasks you wish to perform for credit from the list below as items from a menu. I recommend writing the two main papers, taking the midterm exam and the final exam, and participating in discussion section every week (items 1–6). You will notice that one can, technically, earn more than 100 points. This is because most students will not earn all the possible points for any finished task, and students may choose to omit tasks with the exception of the final exam.

Opportunity	Max. Points Possible
1. first essay paper (6–8 pages) (due Sept 26)	20
2. second essay paper (6–8 pages) (due Nov 21)	20
3. quizzes in recitation section	12
4. recitation section participation in discussion	10
5. midterm exam (at lecture time on October 12th)	20
6. required final exam (at scheduled time in lecture hall)	20
7. Old Persian Reading Exercises, optional (weeks 2–8)	5
8. Museum report, optional	5

NOTE Extensions to assignment deadlines are given only in the case of *documented medical emergency!*

Academic Misconduct

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed ; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (<http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>).

Class Attendance Policy

Students should attend all lectures and recitation sections. Experience shows that students who attend and pay attention to both do well in this class. Participation in recitation sections is an opportunity to earn points in this course.

Please discuss excused absences from discussion section with your TA as early as possible. More than one absence may be grounds for reduction of your final grade by one-third of a letter (for example, B to B-). More than three absences will result in a grade of “EN” for the course.

Disability policy

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

General Instructions for Papers in this Course

You may write two essay papers for this course. In addition you may choose also to write a report on a visit to a museum holding ancient Near Eastern artifacts.

First Essay due September 26th (Week 6)

Second Essay due November 21st (Week 14)

Museum Report due any time before

- For a paper to count as turned in, you must submit BOTH a paper copy to me AND an electronic copy to the course Carmen site. If you do not do this, it will not be considered.
- Format all papers double-spaced with Times New Roman, 12-point font, 1" margins at top and bottom, 1.25" margins on sides. Make sure you proofread and spell-check. Spelling and grammar are considered in the evaluation.
- All papers must include references to any primary sources (including the texts we're reading for the course) and a bibliography of works consulted. Cite everything scrupulously.

First Essay Topic: The Persian Empire in a Museum.

Due Week 6 (Sept 26).

Your course book *Forgotten Empire* is based on a major exhibition of ancient objects created and used in the Achaemenian Persian Empire. The exhibition was held in 2005 by the British Museum in collaboration with the National Museum of Iran and the Louvre. It includes photographs of the objects displayed along with detailed information about each object. As you study the catalogue of photographs, you are surveying many of the same materials that professional historians use today to reconstruct the history and culture of the Persian Empire. At the same time, the catalogue represents the selection of museum curators who wish to represent the Persian Empire as they imagine it for visitors to their museum.

Write an essay, 6–8 pages in length, discussing any patterns you can see in the selection and type of materials presented. What sorts of objects are included, and what sorts are not included? What are the reasons behind these patterns? What do these objects tell us about the history of the Persian Empire, and what do they leave out?

Second Essay Topic: The Historiography of the Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite.

Due Week 14 (Nov 21).

The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite, written in the Syriac dialect of Aramaic in the early sixth century CE, describes life in Mesopotamia and Syria during the wars between the Sasanian Persian and Roman Empires. Basing your analysis on a close reading of the text, discuss in 6–8 pages the author's purpose in writing this chronicle and describe his method as a historian. How does he interpret the events he describes in order to construct a narrative? How does he make sense of his own society's history? Explain your answers with specific examples from the text.

Museum Report (optional).

Due any time before Dec 2.

Several museums within driving range of Columbus, Ohio, have substantial collections of objects from the ancient Near East. Most preeminent of them is the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (oi.uchicago.edu), perhaps the most important collection of such antiquities in North America (5.5 hr drive from OSU). There is also the Cleveland

Museum of Art, which has exhibits of “Ancient Near Eastern, Greek, and Roman” art, “Early Christian and Byzantine” art, and “Ancient Egyptian” art (2.3 hr drive from OSU). The University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor, Michigan, hosts the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology (lsa.umich.edu/kelsey, 3.3 hr drive from OSU). The Cincinnati Art Museum web site says that its Near East Gallery is under construction but they have an Antiquities gallery that may include some Near Eastern objects; this museum is a 1.45 hr drive from OSU.

You can choose to visit one of these museums or another equivalent pre-approved by the instructor in order to write a report about your visit. *Make sure to get a photo of yourself there.* Referring to *at least* three specific objects in the exhibit from three different periods or regions, discuss the value and limitations of the exhibit you visited in 2–3 pages. What, if anything, does seeing these objects in person teach you? Turn in your report on the Canvas site and send a copy electronically to both instructors along with the photo of yourself standing in front of one of these exhibits.

If you visit a museum for this assignment, inquire in advance about the hours of operation. Some museums will give discounts or even free admission to university students. Bring friends with you and have fun!

COURSE SCHEDULE

Schedule subject to change. All changes will be announced in class.

Week 1 (Aug 24, 26): Introduction. The Geographical Setting. Tradition, recovery, and archaeology.

- Reade, J. E., “The History of Assyria,” from *Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995, pp. 17–31.

Online assignment this week:

Explore the British Museum website “Mesopotamia”

www.mesopotamia.co.uk/menu.html

Here you will find a lot of hyperlinked pages with information and images about ancient Mesopotamian cultures. Some of it is pretty basic, but you should get a sense of the materials available to historians to tell what life was like in this region in antiquity.

Make sure you click “Time” → “Story” (follow story on early archaeology)

“Writing” → “Story” (follow development of cuneiform writing)

“Assyria” → “Palaces” and “Warfare”

“Babylonia” → “Astronomers” and “Trade”

Feel free to explore the rest of the site, take your time, and have fun!

Week 2 (Aug 29, 31, Sept 2): Assyrian and Median Empires. Cyrus.

- Grayson, A. Kirk, “Assyrian Rule of Conquered Territory in Ancient Western Asia,” pp. 959–968.
- Read Herodotus, p. 3 and pp. 45–94 (sections [95] to [216]). [Here Herodotus gives the story of Cyrus and an account of Persian culture.]

- Read the “Nabonidus Cylinder” from Sippar at livius.org:
<http://www.livius.org/na-nd/nabonidus/cylinder.html>
- Read the “Nabonidus Chronicle” at livius.org:
http://www.livius.org/ct-cz/cyrus_I/babylon02.html
- Read the “Cyrus Cylinder” at livius.org. (Make sure to click to page two at the bottom of the first page. You can see a clear photograph of the Cyrus cylinder in *Forgotten Empires*, p. 59.)
http://www.livius.org/ct-cz/cyrus_I/cyrus_cylinder.html

Recitation Section: Introductions. Discussing Herodotus. Using the book *Forgotten Empire*. Receive instructions for the two map quizzes. Expectations for the two term papers.

Week 3 (No Lecture or Discussion Section Sept 5 [Labor Day]; Sept 7 & 9): Darius and his coup d'état. The Royal Inscriptions.

- Read *Forgotten Empire*, pp. 12–24.
- Read Herodotus, excerpts from book 3 (pp. 169–186 and pp. 195–234). [Herodotus gives his accounts of Cambyses and Darius I.]

Online assignment this week: Read the Royal Inscriptions of the Achaemenids.
(This is in addition to the readings listed above!)

www.livius.org/persia.html

This website is a mini-encyclopaedia on ancient Iran. You'll find it useful as a reference throughout the course. There are well-informed articles on important places, people, and different aspects of ancient Iran. Scroll to the bottom of the page to find the link “Royal inscriptions” (under the heading “Other”). Click the link to find a catalogue of the Achaemenid inscriptions.

1. Read DB (columns #1–#5) and DBa–k. Pay close attention; this is the most important document written for any Achaemenid king. Take a good look at the accompanying photographs of the reliefs.
2. Read DSf at the palace of Susa.
3. Read DNa and DNb on Darius' tomb at Naqš-e Rostam.
4. Also explore the links to the sites of Persepolis, Susa, and Naqš-e Rostam. Pay special attention to the photos of the inscriptions.
5. Now move on to the inscriptions of Xerxes I at Persepolis. Read XPa and XPh.
6. Finally, read some of the inscriptions of later Achaemenids. Take your time.

Questions to answer: Where were the inscriptions made? Locate them on a map. What messages do they offer? Why did the kings inscribe them? For whom were they written?

Week 4 (Sept 12, 14 & 16): The Royal Court and Administration of the Achaemenids.

- Read and study *Forgotten Empire*, pp. 50–149 [this is 18 pages of text; the rest is images] and pp. 181–199.
- Read Herodotus, pp. 404–531. [This is Herodotus' famous account of Xerxes' invasion of Greece.]

Recitation Section: Map Quiz 1: Modern Southwest Asia. Introducing Xenophon. Discussion of readings.

Week 5 (Sept 19, 21 & 23): The Persians and the Greeks.

- Read *Forgotten Empire*, pp. 236–249.
- Read Xenophon's *Persian Expedition*, pp. 55–211.

Recitation Section: Map Quiz 2: Ancient Southwest Asia. Discussion of readings. Workshop for first essay paper.

Week 6 (Sept 26, 28 & 30): Establishing and Maintaining Frontiers Internal and External.

- **Paper 1 due on Monday, September 26th!** The Persian Empire in a Museum.
- Wednesday, Sept 28th: in-class video excerpts of the documentary “Grass” with commentary
- Read “Conquering and Ruling Pre-Modern Afghanistan,” from Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, pp. 66–89. This reading does not deal with the Persian Empire per se, but it consists of comparative and theoretical material essential for understanding the contents of this course.
- Read *Forgotten Empire*, pp. 210–235. (This is just 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ pages of text; the rest is images of objects with captions. Focus on understanding the organization of transport and warfare in the Persian Empire.)

Recitation Section: Greek views of the Persian Empire. Discussion of readings.

Week 7 (Oct 3, 5 & 7): The Aftermath of Alexander. The Seleucids, the Parthians, and Roman Annexation of Syria.

- Read “An Incidental Annexation” and “Rome, Syria, Parthians and Persians,” from Kevin Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, pp. 19–60.
- Read article at Encyclopaedia Iranica Online: “BAKTĪĀRĪ TRIBE i. Ethnography” <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/baktiari-tribe>, by J.-P. Digard. This is a follow-up to the documentary “Grass” that we watched Sept 28th. You need to read the first part down to the first bibliography and no further; this is the equivalent of about eight pages in a Word document. When you read this article, you should pay particular attention to the interaction of the pastoralist Bakhtiari people and the governments of sedentary Iran. You will be discussing this reading in your section meeting.

Discussion Section: Discussion of readings. “Alexander the Great”?

Week 8 (Oct 10 & 12; No Lecture Oct 14 [Autumn Break]): Midterm. Rome, the Parthians, and the Buffer States.

MIDTERM EXAMINATION: WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12

- Read *2 Maccabees*.

Online assignment this week: Browse Parthia.com.

www.parthia.com

This is essentially a scholarly fan site for the ancient Parthian kingdom. It contains maps, essays, and extensive bibliography. Start by browsing the site to see what's there.

One of the main primary sources available from the Parthian kingdom is coins, together with a limited number of art objects and durable luxury goods. What can you learn by studying the online coin catalogue and other information on this website?

Write a concise summary of your findings (no more than a page) to discuss in your section meeting. What do these coins tell us about the Parthian dominion?

Recitation Section: Review for midterm exam. Telling history from everyday objects and coins.

Week 9 (Oct 17, 19 & 21): The Rise of the Sasanids of Persia until the defeat of Narse (third century CE).

- Read Dignas and Winter, pp. 9–32, pp. 53–62, pp. 70–88, pp. 119–130.

Online assignment this week: Study the Sasanian Rock Reliefs.

(This is in addition to the readings listed above!)

www.livius.org/persia.html

This is the same website where you read the Achaemenid inscriptions. Now you are looking at inscriptions and rock carvings from hundreds of years later, portraying the Sasanian kings. Go to the bottom of the page and click on “Sasanian rock reliefs.” Focus on nos. 50, 53, 55, 57, 60, 63, 73, 74, 80, and 81–84. (No. 57 is the site of the inscription ŠKZ on the handout.)

Questions to answer: How do these reliefs portray the kings? What are the kings shown as doing? What symbols did the sculptors use, and why did they use them? Pay attention also to the locations where these reliefs were made. Did their locations have any special meaning? Find and identify the magian priest named Kartir (a.k.a. Kirdir), too.

When you're done studying the reliefs, go back to the main page and click on “Sasanian crowns.” This will give you some close-ups of the elaborate headgear that these kings wore. Each one had a unique crown that can be used to identify him in coins and in other depictions. There are links to images of these coins so you can see for yourself.

Discussion Section: Discussion of readings. Were the Sasanians the heirs of the Achaemenids?

Week 10 (Oct 24, 26 & 28): The Rivalry between the Romans and the Sasanian Persians into the fifth century.

- Read Handout: Shapur's trilingual inscription (ŠKZ) at Naqš-i Rostam.

- Read Dignas and Winter, pp. 32–37, pp. 63–69, pp. 88–99, pp. 131–138, pp. 210–225.

Recitation Section: Study of ŠKZ. Introducing “Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite.” Discussion of Readings.

Week 11 (Oct 31, Nov 2 & 4): The Empires at War.

- Read Excerpt from Ammianus Marcellinus, pp. 148–175.
- Read *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*.
- Procopius, *The Wars*, Book 1, chapters xiii–xiv, pp. 103–129 [odd pages only].
- Read Dignas and Winter, pp. 242–263.

Recitation Section: Discussion of readings.

Week 12 (Nov 7 & 9; No Lecture Nov 11 [Veteran’s Day]): Armenia and the Caucasus between the Empires.

- Read Dignas and Winter, pp. 173–195.
- Read *The History of Lazar P’arpec’i*, book 2 (trans. Robert Thomson 1991), pp. 75–157.

Recitation Section: Discussion of readings.

Week 13 (Nov 14, 16 & 18): Persian Ascendancy.

- Read Dignas and Winter, pp. 37–49, pp. 100–118, pp. 138–151, pp. 195–209, pp. 232–241, pp. 263–265.

Recitation Section: Workshop for second essay paper.

Week 14 (Nov 21; lectures not held on Nov 23 & 25 due to Thanksgiving holiday): The Collapse of the Persian Empire and Muhammad’s Movement.

- *Paper 2 due Monday, November 21!* The Historiography of the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*.

Recitation Section: Discussion of readings.

Week 15–16 (Nov 28, 30, Dec 2, 5 & 7): The Ascendancy of Islam. The Legacy of Ancient Iran and the Impact of Ancient Imperialism.

- Read Dignas and Winter, pp. 152–172.
- Patricia Crone, “The Early Islamic World,” in *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, Kurt Raaflaub and N. Lowenstein (eds.), Harvard University Press 1999, pp. 309–32.

Recitation Sections: Review for final exam.

Final Exam: As scheduled by the University (in the lecture hall): Thursday, Dec 15, 10:00–11:45 am.