

HART 207: Religion and Art in Late Antiquity

T/TH 1:10-2:25

Instructor: Robin M. Jensen (robin.jensen@vanderbilt.edu)

Office Hours T/Th 2:30-3:30, Cohen 115 (and by appointment)

### Course Description

A survey of visual art that reflects religious beliefs and practices from the second through the sixth century CE, including monuments from Greco-Roman cults, early Christianity, and Rabbinical Judaism. Students will examine visual art and material artifacts in light of documentary evidence for religious movements during these four transitional and formational centuries.

Course texts (at Vanderbilt Bookstore and on reserve):

Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) = AJGRW.

John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (Phaidon Press, 1997) = ECBA.

Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods* (Princeton University Press, 1999) = CG.

Jeffrey Spier, ed., *Picturing the Bible* (Yale University Press, 2008) = PB.

Other readings will be posted on Oak and most of the books from which they are taken are on reserve. Steven Fine's edited catalogue, *Sacred Realm* (out of print) may be available for purchase = SR.

Also on reserve:

Jas Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer* (Cambridge, 2007).

\_\_\_\_\_, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph* (Oxford, 1999)

Steven Fine, ed., *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1996).

Robin Jensen, *Face to Face: The Portrait of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Fortress, 2004).

Henry Maguire, *Byzantine Magic* (Dumbarton Oaks, 2009).

Linda Safran, ed., *Heaven on Earth: Art and the Church in Byzantium* (Penn State, 1998).

Kurt Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art: Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Princeton, 1979).

\_\_\_\_\_. *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium* (Princeton, 1980).

### Exams and Written Assignments

1. Two exams: one at midterm and one during finals week. Each exam will present ten images for analysis (non cumulative), and be worth 25% of the final grade. Images will be selected from class lectures, which will be posted on Oak prior to each class.
2. Two brief object analyses (1000 -1200 words). Instructions and a list of suggestions will be posted (students analyze an object that is not included on the list with instructor's permission). Analyses must include illustrations (photocopies, scans, or attached jpegs). Each analysis will be worth 25% of the final grade. Due: Feb. 25 and April 22, 5:00 p.m. Unexcused late papers will be marked down by one half a letter grade per day.

Attendance is expected and class participation and preparation will be noted. More than three unexcused absences will result in lowering final grade by one full mark. Late papers will be discounted unless an extension has been officially granted.

### COURSE SYLLABUS

#### PART I: Overview of Religion and Art in Late Antiquity

Week 1 (Jan. 13): Overview of the Course and Introductory Lecture

Week 2 (Jan. 20): Iconography of the Pagan Gods/Beginnings of Christian Art

Read: Jas Elsner, "From the Literal to the Symbolic" (Oak)

Jeffrey Spier, "The Earliest Christian Art," PB

Mary Charles Murray, "The Emergence of Christian Art," PB

John Lowden, "God and Salvation," ECBA

Week 3: (January 25/27): Jewish Art and Jewish Identity

Read: Steven Fine, "Art and Identity in the Greco Roman World," AJGRW

Rachel Hachlili, "Synagogues in the Land of Israel" (Oak)

#### PART II: Pagan, Jewish, Christian Art in Synthesis

Week 4 (Feb. 1/3): The Image Question: Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Aniconism

Read: Robin Jensen, "The Invisible God and The Visible Image," (Oak)

Fine, "Archaeology and the Search for Nonrabbinic Judaism"

"Textbooks and the Rhetoric of Jewish Artlessness"

“Toward a New Jewish Archaeology” (all in AJGRW)

Week 5 (Feb. 8/10): The Imperial Cult – Art and Power

Read: Mathews, “The Mistake of the Emperor Mystique,” CG  
Johannes Deckers, “Constantine the Great and Early Christian Art,” PB  
Robin Jensen, “The Emperor as Christ or Christ as Emperor” (Oak)  
Lowden, Emperors and Holy Men, ECBA, 63-100

Week 6 (Feb. 15/17): Survival of the Pagan Gods in Jewish and Christian Art

Read: Mathews, “Larger than Life,” and “Christ Chameleon,” CG, 92-141  
Fine, “Synagogue Mosaics,” AJGRW, 184-205  
George Hanfmann, “The Continuity of Classical Art: Culture, Myth, and Faith (Oak)

Week 7 (Feb. 22/24): Visual Exegesis: Text and Image Juxtaposed

Read: Jensen, “Early Christian Images and Exegesis,” PB 65-85  
Kessler, “The Word Made Flesh in Early Decorated Bibles,” PB 141-68

Week 8 (March 1/3): Art and Death

Read: Jas Elsner, “Art and Death,” (Oak)  
Fine, “Art and Identity in Diaspora Communities,” AJGRW, 124-34

SPRING BREAK, March 6-12

NO CLASS, March 15

MIDTERM EXAM- MARCH 17

PART III: Iconographic Themes, Controversies, and Conundrums

Week 9 (March 22/24): The Portrait of Christ, the Cross, and the Crucifixion

Read: Robin Jensen, “Portraits of the Incarnate One,” and  
“The Passion in Early Christian Art” (Oak)

Week 10 (March 29/31): Dome and Apse: Images of Heaven (City and Garden)

Read: Kessler, “Bright Gardens of Paradise” PB, 111-40  
Mathews, “Convergence,” CG, 142-76

Week 11 (April 5/7): Shrines, Martyrs, and Relics

Read: Gary Vikan, “Byzantine Pilgrims’ Art (Oak)  
Robin Jensen, Relics and the Consecration of Churches (Oak)

Week 12 (April 12/14): Art, Liturgy, and Orthodoxy

Read: Fine, “Liturgy and Art of the Dura Synagogue,” AJGRW, 165-183  
Lowden, “Heretics and Bankers,” ECBA, 101-44  
Robert Ousterhout, “The Holy Space: Architecture and Liturgy” (Oak)

Week 13 (April 19/21): Icons and Iconoclasm

Read: Lowden, "Iconoclasm," ECBA, 145-84

Mathews, "Intimate Icon," CG, 177-190

Anna Kartsonis, "The Responding Icon" (Oak)

Week 14 (April 29): Art and Magic, Amulets

Read: Mathews, "The Magician," CG, 54-91

Henry Maguire, "Magic and the Christian Image" (Oak)