



Hammurabi's Law Code

Honors 340

The Invention and Power of Writing

Syracuse University Fall 2023

Time: 12:45-2:05 on Mondays
& Wednesdays

Place: Bowne Hall 304C

Instructor: [Jim Watts](#) (PhD)

Office: Hall of Languages 501

Chat with the Prof: M 2:30-3:30 pm and by
appointment, in person or online Blackboard

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Course Description: Written texts direct our behavior every day. Whether the U.S. Constitution or the syllabus for this class, we regularly grant normative authority to writing on paper. This course explores how and why writing gained such normative power. We will focus on the ancient history of writing and of normative texts, starting with the invention of writing in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. We will examine the growing authority of ritual texts, including religious scriptures such as the Torah of Judaism and the Bible of Christianity. The course will include the religious and legal motives behind the collections of Roman law by Christian emperors that laid the basis for Western national law. The semester concludes with a prolonged discussion of debt, and the power of written records of debts, to shape class differences and social power. Throughout the course, we will engage the social power of writing in economics, law, and religion, and we will also pay close attention to the social impact of the material forms and visual displays of written texts.

Audience: Students interested in law, literature, history, political science and religion, and the humanities generally.

Honors Attributes: Completing this course counts towards Honors Program attributes in the Humanities and Interdisciplinary Breadth.

Course Objectives: The goals of this course goals are to have students

1. gain sufficient familiarity with evidence for the origins of writing to be able to assess the original and secondary functions of written texts;
2. develop an understanding of how written texts shape individual and social behavior;
3. recognize the social possibilities and dangers of normative textuality in past and contemporary societies.

Course Requirements: The course consists of class discussions, student study and research, and, most of all, readings. This course is a **reading** course, and students' completion of all reading assignments is essential for their success. Assignments, discussions, lectures and tests all presuppose that students have read carefully and on schedule the assigned readings. Questions to guide students' reading can be found in the schedule below.

Evaluations of students work:

Daily reading responses due at 10 am on days with reading assignments	15%
Three papers due by 8 am on Sep 27, Oct 30, and Dec ??	25% each
Attendance and participation	10%

The grading scale is: A+ = 100, A = 95, A- = 92, B+ = 88, B = 85, B- = 82, etc. The grades of late assignments will be reduced by one grade level (e.g. B to B-). Incidents of plagiarism or cheating result in no credit (0) for the test or assignment and may result in further disciplinary action (see academic integrity statement below). Students may check their grades online through the [Blackboard Learning System](#).

Are YOU participating?

Attendance isn't enough. To succeed in this class, you must fully engage in activities and discussions. These criteria determine your participation grade.

EXCELLENT: You are present, prepared, and engaged. You consistently refer to the readings, lectures, and class discussions from other weeks. You encourage others' comments and questions in a productive and respectful manner.

GOOD: You are present and prepared, and you offer thoughtful questions and comments that demonstrate your preparation for discussion and attention to readings and lectures.

ADEQUATE: You are present and prepared, but limit your contributions to several surface-level observations or clarifying questions about lectures or readings.

MINIMAL: You usually make a single comment during discussions in response to another student's observations or insights. ("I agree with them.")

Class-room Behavior: A successful learning experience depends on students' behavior in class, as much as on the quality of their work and on the teacher's presentations.

- I encourage energetic discussion of relevant topics and I expect different opinions among class members, but always express your ideas with respect for those who may disagree with you or have different life experiences from yours.
- Arrive on time. If you must be late, enter quietly. Do not leave during class except for emergencies.
- Turn off cell phones, laptops, and tablets. If you need to use an electronic device for class work (notes, assignments), you *must sit where I can see the screen*. Texting, e-mailing or web browsing during class are grounds for being dismissed from that day's class.

Academic Integrity: Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Under the policy, students found in violation are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered as described in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. Syracuse University students are required to read an online summary of

the University's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice.

Students will submit their papers to Turnitin via Blackboard, where both students and instructor can view the results. Turnitin compares submitted documents against documents on the Internet and against student papers submitted to Turnitin at Syracuse University and at other colleges and universities. I will take your knowledge of the subject matter of this course and your writing level and style into account in interpreting the originality report. Keep in mind that all papers you submit for this class will become part of the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

In this course, students found cheating on an assignment will receive zero (0) credit for that test or assignment and may result in further disciplinary action. For more information and the complete policy, see the Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS) in Bird Library or at <http://class.syr.edu/>.

Discrimination or Harassment:

The University does not discriminate and prohibits harassment or discrimination related to any protected category including creed, ethnicity, citizenship, sexual orientation, national origin, sex, gender, pregnancy, disability, marital status, age, race, color, veteran status, military status, religion, sexual orientation, domestic violence status, genetic information, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender.

Any complaint of discrimination or harassment related to any of these protected bases should be reported to Sheila Johnson-Willis, the University's Chief Equal Opportunity & Title IX Officer. She is responsible for coordinating compliance efforts under various laws including Titles VI, VII, IX and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. She can be contacted at Equal Opportunity, Inclusion, and Resolution Services, 005 Steele Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-1120; by email: titleix@syr.edu; or by telephone: 315-443-0211.

Federal and state law, and University policy prohibit discrimination and harassment based on sex or gender (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, and retaliation). If a student has been harassed or assaulted, they can obtain confidential counseling support, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, from the Sexual and Relationship Violence Response Team at the Counseling Center (315-443-4715, 200 Walnut Place, Syracuse, New York 13244-5040). Incidents of sexual violence or harassment can be reported non-confidentially to the University's Title IX Officer (Sheila Johnson Willis, 315-443-0211, titleix@syr.edu, 005 Steele Hall). Reports to law enforcement can be made to the University's Department of Public Safety (315-443-2224, 005 Sims Hall), the Syracuse Police Department (511 South State Street, Syracuse, New York, 911 in case of emergency or 315-435-3016 to speak with the Abused Persons Unit), or the State Police (844-845-7269).

I will seek to keep information you share with me private to the greatest extent possible, but as a professor I have mandatory reporting responsibilities to share information regarding sexual misconduct, harassment, and crimes I learn about to help make our campus a safer place for all.

Religious Observances Policy: SU religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to are religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through *MySlice/StudentServices/Enrollment/MyReligiousObservances* from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

Disability-Related Accommodations: If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) located at 804 University Avenue, third floor or go to the ODS website at disabilityservices.syr.edu and click current students tab to register on-line. You may also call 315.443.4498 to speak to someone regarding specific access needs. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue 'Accommodation Letters' to students as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. My goal as your instructor is to create learning environments that are useable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, I invite you to meet with me to discuss additional strategies beyond accommodations that may be helpful to your success.

Required Textbooks: available on reserve or online through Bird Library (click [here](#)) and also available for purchase in the Syracuse Bookstore in Shine Center.

Robinson, Andrew. *Writing and Script: a very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Graeber, David. *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. New York: Melville, 2011.

Other required readings are available through the Blackboard System or online by links imbedded in the syllabus.

Schedule of Topics and Assignments:

- Reading assignments must be completed by class on the day listed. Keep the reading questions in mind as your read and make notes.
- **Textbook** = readings by page numbers from required books by Robinson and Goody
- **Pdf** = pdf files available in Blackboard > Content.

- **Online** = online readings hotlinked in the syllabus in Blackboard > Content.
- **Bible** = readings from the Bible by book name, chapter (before any colon) and verses (after the colon).

Dates	Topics	Assignments
Mon Aug 28	Introductions	
Wed Aug 30	Ancient Near Eastern History	Pdf Liverani, “Historical Overview”
Mon Sep 4	Labor Day	NO CLASS
Wed Sep 6	Origins of Writing	Online How to Write Cuneiform ; BBC First Accountants Pdf Schmandt-Besserat, “Record Keeping Before Writing” Textbook Robinson 5-8 “Clay Tokens”
Mon Sep 11	Writing and Politics	Online Lanchester, “ The Case Against Civilization: Did our hunter-gatherer ancestors have it better? ” <i>New Yorker</i> Online Gilman, “ Is Government a Protection Racket? How Wheat and Taxes Built the Ancient States, ” <i>LA Review</i>
Wed Sep 13	Diffusion and Disappearance of Writing	Textbook Robinson 17-51 “Chapter 2: Development and Diffusion of Writing” and “Chapter 3: Disappearance of Scripts”; History of Writing Hieroglyphics to Squiggles
Mon Sep 18	Origins of Cuneiform	Textbook Robinson 8-16 “Pictograms” & “... Full Writing” Pdf Cooper, “Babylonian beginnings”
Wed Sep 20	Origins of Egyptian Hieroglyphics	Textbook Robinson 74-91 “How Writing Systems Work” Pdf Baines “The Earliest Egyptian Writing”
Mon Sep 25	Origins of the Alphabet	Online Illiterate Egyptian Miners , Phoenician Alphabet Textbook Robinson 92-109 “Chapter 6: Alphabets”
Wed Sep 27	No class	First Paper DUE at 12:45 p.m.
Mon Oct 2	Contracts, treaties, covenants	Online Babatha’s Marriage Contract Online Succession Treaties of Esarhaddon Bible Exodus 24 Online Hundley, “ The Making of Monotheism ”
Wed Oct 4	Torah as law and ritual text	Bible Exodus 19:1-8 ; Leviticus 1, 11, 19 ; Deuteronomy 31:9-13 Pdf Watts, “Political and Legal Uses”
Mon Oct 9	Fall Break	NO CLASS
Wed Oct 11	Christian Scripture	Bible Romans 7:1-8:9 ; Matthew 5-7 ; Pdf Verheyden, “New Testament Canon” Pdf Irenaeus
Mon Oct 16	Libraries with Sebastian Modrow	Online: Stauffer & Modrow, Libraries, Archives, Museums ... Through the Ages (2021), chapters 1 & 2

Wed Oct 18	Cuneiform Law Codes	Pdf Roth, Hammurabi's Code
Mon Oct 23	Christian Roman Law	Online Roman Law and Justinian's Code Pdf Humfress, "Judging by the Book"
Wed Oct 25	Medieval canon law	Pdf Hoeflich and Grabher, "The Establishment of Normative Legal Texts"
Mon Oct 30	No class	Second Paper Due at 12:45 p.m.
Wed Nov 1 MEET in Special Collections, Bird Library 6th floor	Texts as Artifacts	Online Haaretz, Truly Ancient Bibles Textbook Robinson 123-134 "Chapter 8: Scribes and Materials" Online Napoleon and the Scientific Expedition to Egypt Pdf Said, <i>Orientalism</i> , 79-87. Online Porter, Benjamin W. Chap. 3 from Handbook of Postcolonial Archaeology , 2010.
Mon Nov 6	Files and Documentation	Pdf Vismann, preface to <i>Files, Law and Media Technology</i>
Wed Nov 8	Colonial Power through Writing	
Mon Nov 13	Art versus Writing	Pdf MacDonald, "Egypt at the Petrie Museum" Online: Cotter, " 'African Origin' Show at Met ," <i>NYTimes</i> , Jan. 7, 2022.
Wed Nov 15	Currency as Text	Textbook Graeber, <i>Debt</i> 212-14, 268-70 Pdf Surowiecki, "A Brief History of Money" Rahmatian, "Money as a Normative Text"
Nov 19-26	Thanksgiving Break	
Mon Nov 27	Debt & Morality	Textbook Graeber, <i>Debt</i> 89-124, 182-97, 258-59 women
Wed Nov 29	Debt & Money	Textbook Graeber, <i>Debt</i> 144-66, 198-207 slaves,
Mon Dec 4	Debt & Politics	Textbook Graeber, <i>Debt</i> 214-21, 251-57
Wed Dec 6	Debt & Religion	Textbook Graeber, <i>Debt</i> 73-87, 223-50, 266-68, 270-98
	Postscript	No assignment: answer usual reading questions about entire course.
Mon Dec ??		Final Paper Due at 12:45 pm

Bibliography:

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