Magic, Witchcraft, and the Occult
REL 3623-30236 (SPRING 2023)

Instructor: Dr. Glen J. Fairen
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Class Time: TR 12:00-1:15
Class Location: CLB 308

Course Description and Objectives:
This course will NOT teach you how to use magic, or about the hidden history of the Earth Goddess, or how to spot “Satanism” or the “Occult” (as fun as that may all be). What this course WILL try to do is—from a methodologically non-confessional, skeptical, and perhaps atheistic position—explore the categories of “witchcraft,” “magic,” and the “occult” on two general levels. One, what kinds of people, ideas, and human productions are associated with witchcraft, magic, and the occult? How do these activities fit into their broader historical, social, and cultural contexts, and why are people interested in them? In other words, what makes a witch a witch and what makes what they do witchy or occult-ish? Two, how do people (including scholars) use the terms “witchcraft,” “magic,” and “occult” to classify people and human activities in various contexts? What conceptual work—either positive or negative—do these terms do for them? How useful are concepts like witchcraft, magic, and occult for those of us interested in understanding religion as a human production (i.e., those of us engaging in Religious Studies)?

In order to address these questions, we will be looking at several historical periods and geographical locations—such as ancient Greece, medieval Europe, contemporary North America, and contemporary Africa—to see how these terms are used, and what discursive
tidbits are being smuggled in by people when they use them. By the end of the course, students should:

1. Be able to describe, compare, and assess various scholarly and non-scholarly definitions of those social constructions that have been classed as “witchcraft,” “magic,” and the “occult.
2. Be able to discuss these constructions within their historical, social, cultural, and discursive context.
3. Be able to discuss witchcraft and occult practices as ordinary aspects of human culture, i.e., utilize methods common to Religious Studies.
4. Develop a critical and scholarly attitude in discussions of witchcraft and the occult.

**Required Text Book:** None. I will provide all material.

**Assignment Notes:**

*Pop Quizzes:* There will be eight (8) in-class pop quizzes throughout the semester. Each is worth 2.5% for a total of 20% of your final grade (8 x 2.5%=20%). These quizzes will primarily be based on the readings assigned up to the date of the quiz. So for instance, if there is a quiz on January 20, the quiz will only cover the readings Russell “Witchcraft” and Smith “Trading Places.” If the next quiz is held on February 10, it will cover the readings you should have read from the last quiz to the current topic. In this instance that will mean only Stein and Stein “Magic” and Kleckhefer “Common Traditions of Medieval Magic.” Also, the idea of the pop quizzes is to—pardon the pun—pop them on you. This is essentially a way to gauge your participation/attendance. So if you miss a quiz there will be no mechanism to make them up.

*Midterm Exam:* The midterm examination will be based on your readings and lectures from the beginning of the course up to the midterm. It will include definition and short answer style questions and is worth 20% of your final grade. The Midterm will be held on March 2.

*Written Assignment:* See paper instructions at the bottom of the syllabus. This assignment will be worth 40% of your final grade. The paper involves 2 components: an outline/draft of your paper in which I will give you feedback (worth 10%) and the actual final paper (worth 30%). The paper draft is on April 5 (but can be handed in earlier) with the final paper handed in by April 21. The outline/draft will need to be 2-3 pages long, with a clear thesis statement/introduction, 2-3 points that are the “body” of the paper (which is generally the argument that you will muster), and finally a conclusion. Your outline needs to also include a short annotated bibliography of 2-3 of your sources that you will be using in your paper. An annotated bibliography basically means providing a properly cited source (MLA, APA, Chicago, SBL, etc.) and a short two to three line summary of the source and why it is relevant for you paper. These are sources that you have found yourself (not provided by me) and are “peer” reviewed. If you are unsure of what this means, please see the following links to get you started.

https://www.lib.sfu.ca/find/journals-articles/what-peer-reviewed-journal or https://library.okstate.edu/search-and-find/articles

Each paper must be at least eight (8) pages but no more than ten (10), double-spaced. This does not include a bibliography. I will provide a detailed set of guidelines on canvas.
**Final Exam:** The final exam will have the same form as the midterm but will be based on the readings assigned in the second half of the semester (i.e., the readings assigned after the midterm). The Final exam will be worth 20% of your final grade. The Final May 9, 11:00-11:50 (please double check with the OSU exam schedule. The following outline is tentative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>READING</th>
<th>DUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 17-19</td>
<td>Introduction: Witches and Priests, Magic and Religion, the Occult and Piety: General Concerns, Questions and issues of Classification.</td>
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<td>Feb 7-16</td>
<td>Middle Ages Magic.</td>
<td>Stein and Stein “Magic” Kleckhefer. “Common Traditions of Medieval Magic”</td>
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<td>Feb 21-28</td>
<td>The Witch Hunts / Salem</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>March 2-9</td>
<td>Witchcraft in Africa</td>
<td>Jackson “The Witch as a Category and a Person”</td>
<td>Midterm: March 2nd</td>
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<td>April 13-20</td>
<td>Nazism and the Construction of the “Occult.”</td>
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<td>Paper Outline: April 5 but sooner is better.</td>
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Policy for Late Assignments:

Students who consult with me in advance regarding expected issues preventing the timely completion of an assignment may, at my discretion, be granted an extension. Otherwise, assignments may be handed in one class-day after the stated deadline without penalty, with a 10%-per-class-day penalty assessed for each subsequent class-day of lateness.

Paper Guide:

Please follow these directions to the letter for your final submission. These are not difficult to do, but deviations will unfortunately cost you. Keep in mind there will be NO EXCEPTIONS to these requirements. Your term paper will need to be:

2) Double spaced with 1 inch (or 2.5 cm) margins all the way around. Please use APA, MLA or Chicago style for your paper (including all in-text citations, foot or end notes, and bibliography). I do not care which one but just be consistent. When all else fails check the SBL style sheet provided.
3) Each paper must be at least eight (8) pages but no more than ten (10). This does not include a bibliography and the title page.
4) Bibliography. You will need a minimum of 6 “peer reviewed” or “academic” sources beyond the provided readings (which you can nonetheless use). So stuff you find in the library. And I mean not just “found” in Google Scholar...that doesn’t count. Or Wikipedia. You have to go to, or use the resources of, the library. Don’t worry...it’s nice there. It is where the books live. Finally, 6 is only the minimum. You can certainly can and should go over that.

I usually get folks asking if this is an “opinion” or a “research / facts-based” paper. The thing is, it is neither. While I certainly want your opinion, I want your opinion as it has been formed through the lens of our textbooks, and/or by researching what others have said about a given topic. So what does this mean? Well, I DON’T want a list or a précis of what other folks have said with none of your own analysis. On the other hand I also DO NOT want you to just say something like “I feel that religion is bad / good / evil / stupid because that is how I feel or that is what I believe or what I was taught by my church / temple / mosque / synagogue / druid grove.”

Sigh. Don’t do that.

While opinions are required, one also needs evidence in a university. Personal beliefs or gut feelings just cannot be cited or footnoted. This is particularly true of claiming “facts” that are simply positions of religious belief (which for some might seem weird since this is a
religious studies class). While one can argue from a religious POV, simply stating something like “such and such is bad cause God(s) says so” has no place in this kind of class. So...what I want (and what any university prof wants, really) is your idea / opinion, but based around or grounded in the work of others which is then employed to provide analysis of a given topic or question.

As for topics for the paper…the thing is, given the broad nature of the class it is kind of hard to assign a topic or even a list of topics. And to be frank if you are going to write a paper it is always better to pick something you want to write as opposed to what you have to write.

Please also find the official OSU “syllabus attachment” here: