**CLST 360a: Magic and Witchcraft in the Greek and Roman Worlds**

**Mon/Weds/Fri 11-12, Geography**

Instructor: Siobhán (pronounced: Shivaunne) McElduff ([siobhan.mcelduff@ubc.ca](mailto:siobhan.mcelduff@ubc.ca))

Office: Buchanan C210

Office hours: Monday 3-4; Wednesday 2-3 or by appointment.

Preferred pronouns: She/her/hers

**Content warning:** Some of the material we will read for this course is deeply disturbing and contains discussions of violence against humans (including children) and animals. This is particularly true of erotic magic. Please talk to me if this will likely be an issue for you; I am happy to listen to and offer suggestions for how we could work around any problems with the material.

This course will teach you about the world of ancient Greek and Roman magic. At the end of this course you should understand the role magic had in these societies, its omnipresence at all levels of society, how it was thought to work, modern theories of magic, and also how to write your own version of an ancient spell and explain it to others. You will also learn about ancient society as magic is very revealing about Greek and Roman desires and fears.

Required texts:

John Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (referred to as Gager in the schedule of classes)

Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds. A Collection of Ancient Texts* (referred to as Luck in schedule of classes)

(Any edition of these is fine. They have been out for some time, so second hand copies should be available online for purchase.)

Links to other resources will be provided either on Canvas or the blog for this course.

**Schedule of Classes**

**Week 1: Introduction**

September 4th: Introduction; what we will cover; assessments, etc.

September 6: What is magic? Modern theories of magic and magical thinking in our lives

**Week 2: What exactly gets defined as magic?**

**Reading for the week: Luck 33-84** (towards the end this turns into more of an introduction to the various authors we will be reading, so it is perhaps better consulted when you have questions about those authors than reading intensely now.

September 9: What is magic? More! Modern Theories of Magic

September 11: What is magic? Ancient theories and categories of magic (good, bad, and right out).

September 13: Evidence for ancient magic (curse tablets, voodoo dolls, spell books, laws, poetry, oratory, letters, history, etc.)

**Week 3 : Curses, general and legal.**

**Reading for the week: Gager 1-41 (Introduction); 116-150**

September 16: The origins of curses and curse tablets

September 18: How legal curses work

September 20: How to write a curse that works (in ancient terms). This will be a practical class where you write your own curse in class. You may chose to work on Assignment I.

**Week 4: Curses, eating and drinking establishments**

**Reading for the Week: Gager 151-74**

September 23: Greek curses against businesses

September 25: Roman curses against businesses

**September 27: Class cancelled for the climate strike. You might see if your readers have any magic appropriate for this crisis.**

**Week 5: Curses and prayers in the service of lost property and justice**

**Reading for the Week: Gager 175-199**

September 30: Magic in the search of justice I

October 2: Magic in the search of justice II

October 4: How to get lost property back, and use magic in a righteous cause

**Assignment I due**

**Week 6: ‘Love’ Magic**

**Reading for the week Gager 78-115; Luck 129-131, 134-5, 1398**

October 7: Erotic binding spells I

October 9: Erotic binding spells II

October 11: Love potions and charms: how to make them, how to write them. You may work on assignment II during this class.

**Week 7: Love, Magic and the Law**

**Reading for the week: Apuleius’ *Apology* (selections). This reading will be posted on the Canvas site for the course, although some selections are included in the readers.**

**October 14: Thanksgiving. Holiday. University Closed; no class**

October 16: How to end up in the courts as a magician

Poll closes for student choices for the end of term

October 18: The Trial of Apuleius

**Week 8: Daemons and Demons**

**Reading for the week: Luck 135-8, 207-281**

October 21: What is a demon? Where do they come from?

October 23: The magical use of demons

October 25: Summoning and harnessing a demon: various strategies

**Week 9: Witches**

**Reading for the week: Apuleius *Apology* (selections). This is a repeat reading from week 7); Luck 93-108 (Greek witches) 108-127 (Roman witches); 266-69 (why witches are scary)**

October 28: Greek witches

**Assignment II due**

October 30: Roman witches

November 1: Deaths attributed to witches in real life (obviously not so much a practical class but looking at evidence for such deaths and how they show fears played out in real life)

**Week 10: Necromancy**

**Reading for the week: Luck 210-13; 223-227, 230-232, 244-259, 262-66(a repeat of some of the reading for week 8)**

November 4: How necromancy works: principles and theories. The reasons for necromancy

November 6: Various ancient perspectives and strategies for raising the dead.

November 8: Why and how to raise the dead: critiquing the ancient strategies we have looked at over the previous two days in practical terms from ancient and modern perspectives. (Inasmuch as you can talk about ‘practical’ when talking about necromancy.)

**Week 11: Students’ choice: the last three weeks will be dedicated to whatever topics you want to from the ancient world.** This could include: magical ingredients,amulets, alchemy[[1]](#footnote-1), horoscopes,[[2]](#footnote-2) agricultural magic, magic employed by states against threats, philosophers vs. witches and demons, Jesus as a magician, Moses as a magician, drawing down the moon, the evil eye, the magic book….

**November 11: Remembrance Day. University Closed; no class**

November 13: TBA

November 15: TBA

**If you want to work on developing one of your earlier assignments rather than write assignment III, now is the time to tell me.**

**Week 12:**

November 18: TBA

November 20: TBA

**November 22:** TBA

**Assignment III due**

**Week 13**

November 25: TBA

November 27: TBA

November 29: Review and discussion of final. **Last day of classes**

**Readings:** some people prefer to do readings before class, some after class. I would prefer that you read the material assigned for a week the weekend before as I think you get more out of class, but I understand that that might not be possible or preferable for some of you. So I have assigned readings by week. Many readings are repeated, so if you skim or don’t quite get them the first time you will have another chance.

**Grading/Assessment:**

Assignment I: 10%. Write a legal curse or a curse against an ancient dining/entertainment establishment and explain why in ancient terms is would be efficacious. Due October 4th

Assignment II: 20%. Write an attraction spell or design a love charm. Due October 28th.

Assignment III: 20%. Critique an ancient necromantic or demon summoning spell or ritual from both an ancient and modern[[3]](#footnote-3) perspective. Due November 22nd

Rather than writing a traditional research paper, in line with the way the course is structured, the assignments will ask you to produce a work that mixes the ‘practical’ with the theoretical and design a spell or ritual in answer to an ancient need, and discuss how and why it would work in ancient terms. More details on the assignment sheets.

You must write the first two assignments; however, you can ask to develop one of those further for the final assignment, or turn it into a more traditional research assignment. **But you must talk with me about that before November 15th.**

Class attendance and participation: 15%.

Final: 35%. The final will take place during the exam period allocated in December by UBC. It will focus on the same areas as the assignments: understanding the relationship between the practice and theory of magic in the ancient world. You will be asked to construct and explain the efficacy of 2 spells, rituals or magic potion/unguent from a selection of options, and also comment on an ancient spell or ritual.

**There is no midterm for this class. If, however, it turns out no one is doing the readings to a level that it affects how we progress in class, I may introduce occasional reading quizzes. The marks for those will form part of your class participation + attendance grade**

**Other important information**

**Dealing with stress and the long Vancouver winter:** College can be a very stressful experience, and the rains of November and December don’t help with our moods. During any course it can be easy to fall behind and feel lost, which then adds to the stress, so please do reach out to me if you feel overwhelmed or stressed at any point and we can see what we can do to help in terms. UBC also has a number of resources available to students, including the Wellness Centre in the Life Building. 24/7 Support can be found with Empower Me (1 844 741 6398). A list of other resources can be found here: http://thrive.ubc.ca/help-support/wellbeing-resources/

**Academic concessions:** If you are unable to come to class, submit homework or to sit quizzes, midterms or the end-term exam, please notify your instructor **in** writing, before or on the day of the missed class, submission or exam. Arrangements can be made to make up missed midterms, but only with a valid excuse. In the case of a missed final exam, the university requires you to apply to your faculty's Advising Office for deferred standing, which entitles you to sit the exam in the following summer (or earlier).

**Academic concessions for illness:** As per UBC policy, if you have to miss a class or an exam due to the onset of an acute illness that will soon be resolved, and do not need to visit a health professional, self-certification is sufficient. If you anticipate a prolonged absence then you may be asked for supporting documentation.

**Academic concessions on compassionate grounds.** As per UBC policy, if you have to miss a class or exam and are requesting a concession on compassionate grounds, self-certification is sufficient. As traumatic events may show effects long after the occurrence of the event, a self-declaration is sufficient for the first incidence where re-traumatization occurs. If you anticipate a prolonged absence then you may be asked for supporting documentation.

**Other concessions:** Self-certification is also sufficient if you need to miss a class or assessment for conflicting responsibilities (such as needing to take care of an ill relative, child-care responsibilities) or for religious, cultural, or other reasons/responsibilities. If you will need to miss class repeatedly, however, your instructor may ask for supporting information.

**Plagiarism:** This is a serious offence and treated so by the university. As was stealing spells in antiquity. The UBC Learning Commons has a good page on what plagiarism is and why it matters here: <https://learningcommons.ubc.ca/resource-guides/avoid-plagiarism/>

I understand that because our assignments are not traditional you may have more questions – I am happy to answer these in office hours and in class. But it’s not a good question to discuss over email.

**Email policy:** I try to reply to all emails in 24 hours (not including holidays and weekends). If you haven’t received an email back after that, feel free to email me (in fact, I appreciate the reminder). Many questions, however, are not best answered over email, and so if you send me one of those, I will ask you to meet as the better option.

**Important! The instructor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus as necessary.**

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.

Details of the policies and how to access support are availableon[**the UBC Senate website**](https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success)**.**

1. Alchemy is actually really, really boring. You won’t believe how boring. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. To do this properly though you need math. Quite a lot of math. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. One word: zombies [↑](#footnote-ref-3)