

ARTH/RELS 3330

Material Christianities: The First Millennium

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Course Description

- What can objects tell us about Christianity? How might a lavish mosaic, a withered body part, a dark crypt, or a pilgrim's oil lamp challenge and complicate visions of the past extracted from texts? This course investigates the first thousand years of Christianity through the lens of material culture. The history of Christianity—from its nebulous beginnings in Palestine to its recognition as the official religion of the Roman Empire and subsequent expansion—is often narrated from a perspective that privileges the writings of elite men. To capture the rich diversity in Christian experience and expression, we will turn to the material practices of religion and explore how things, places, and bodily acts shaped what it meant to be Christian. Building on insights drawn from archaeology, art history, anthropology, and religious studies, we will seek to recover the experiences of diverse and often marginalized subjects and communities, and in the process, will problematize the categories of religion, authority, and identity.

Course Structure & Materials

- ARTH/RELS 3330 will meet on **Wednesday, 1:45–4:45**.
- Most sessions will consist of a group discussion of the readings assigned for that day, with little lecturing on our part. All the assigned readings will be available in electronic format via Canvas. No textbook will be used in the seminar.
- In addition to traditional scholarly texts (articles, book chapters, and historical source materials in translation), the seminar will occasionally engage with alternative forms of scholarship, including podcasts, videos, and blogs.
- ARTH/RELS 3330 will include excursions and museum and library visits.

Course Assignments & Grading

- Your grade for the course will be assessed based on the following components: class attendance and lively participation (20%); two quizzes (5% each); two papers (20% each); and a final project (30%).
- In the first paper, you will be asked to produce an experimental piece of scholarship and write an object autobiography. The second paper will consist of an analysis of a primary source.
- For the final project you curate a virtual exhibition.