

HISTORY OF  
ANCIENT  
RELIGION

Meeting 6 **Syrians and Canaanites**

- Ancient Semitic peoples
- Semitic religions
- Pollution and atonement
- "The Syrian Goddess"

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**Upcoming dates**

- **Weekly online stuff:**
  - Thursday, 20 October First post due responding to the reading
  - Sunday, 23 October Second post due responding to the discussion  
No quiz this week
- Monday, 24 October **Proposal** due via BlackBoard
- Make sure you have signed up for a responses write-up

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**The Research Essay Proposal**

- State the problem or question you have about the work
- Show that it's a question that can be argued
- Provide a *provisional* thesis statement
- Due 24 October

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### Quiz #3 Recap: Zoroastrians

- Who was Zarathustra? What change did he bring about in ancient Iran?
- What was the distinction between magic and religion in the ancient world?
- What are some of the ways words and language played a role in ancient magical practices?
- Traditional worship of ancient Iranian gods involved all of the following EXCEPT:
  - (c) rites of cleansing involving bathing in butter and soft fruits
- "The First Civilized Man"

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### "The First Civilized Man"



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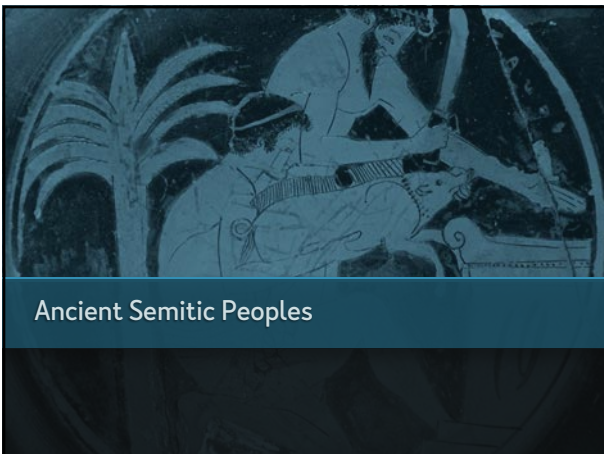
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### Ancient Semitic Peoples



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### Semitic gods and goddesses



Core of 100+ shared Semitic gods

- Dagan (prosperity, fertility, father of the gods)
- Hadad / Baal (thunderer)
- El (king of the gods)
- Astarte (war, hunting, love)
- Atargatis / Baalat (fertility)
- Shamash (sun)
- Eshmun (healing)
- Melqart (king of the underworld)

- Each city-state with its own pantheon
- One particular god or divine couple preeminent



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### Myths



- Show relations between gods; divine assembly
- Reinforce immortality of gods / mortality of humans
- Importance of childbearing
- World of gods separate and unseen

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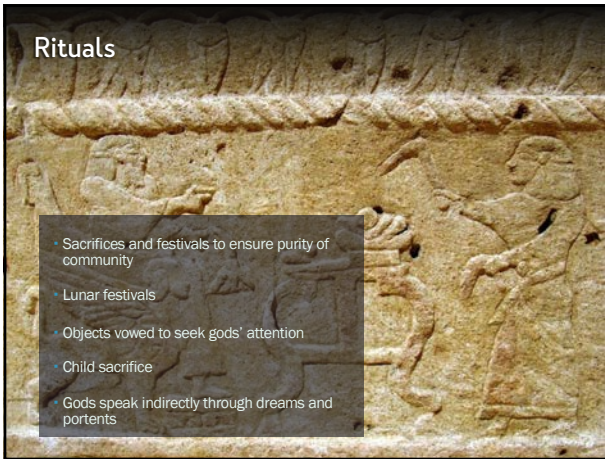
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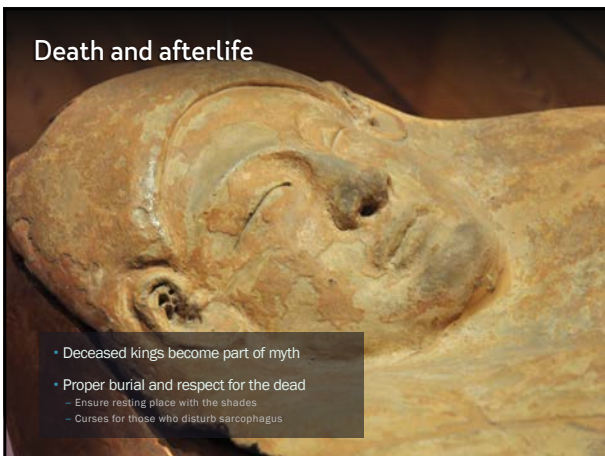
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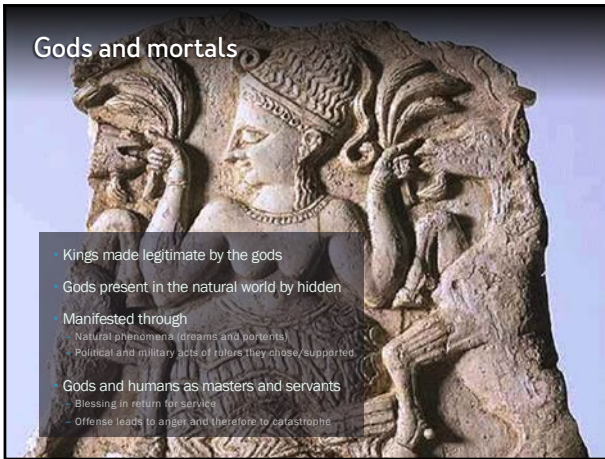
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### Gods and mortals

- Kings made legitimate by the gods
- Gods present in the natural world by hidden
- Manifested through
  - Natural phenomena (dreams and portents)
  - Political and military acts of future they chose/supported
- Gods and humans as masters and servants
  - Blessing in return for service
  - Offense leads to anger and therefore to catastrophe

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### Syrian city-states

- Many texts; small percentage about religion
- Core of west Semitic gods
- City gates named after key gods
- Temples with statues clad in silver and gold
- Destroyed by the Hittites (1600 BCE)

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### Syrian city-states

- Climax of Bronze Age wealth
- Baal myth cycle—rise of Baal among the gods
- Offerings to >100 gods
- Sacrifice of atonement for community/rulers
- Destroyed with collapse of Bronze Age (1185)

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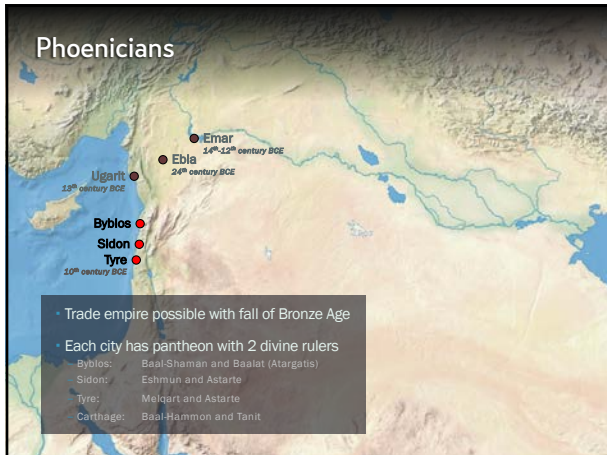
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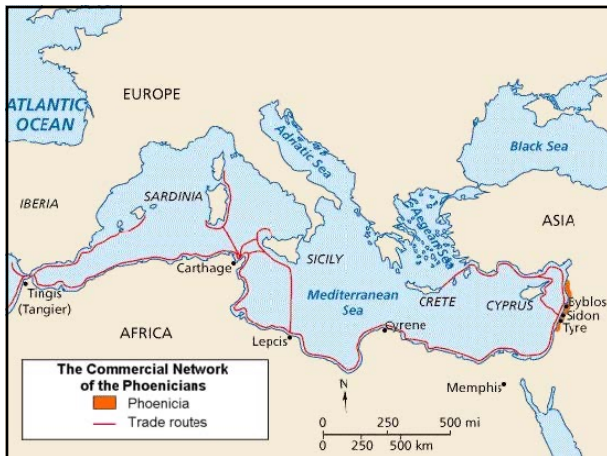
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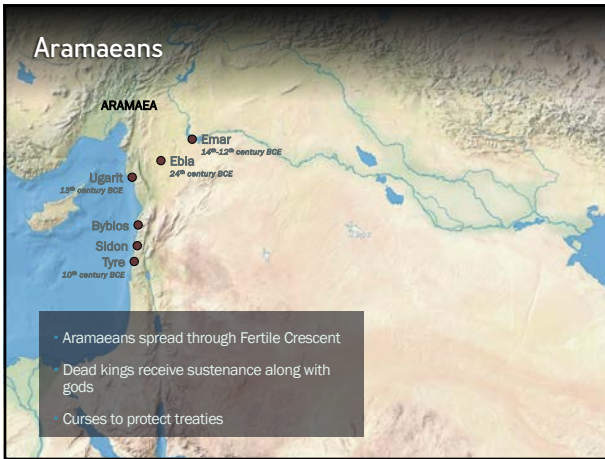
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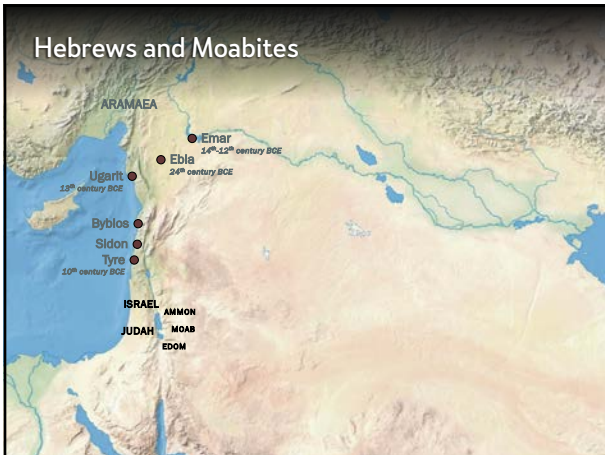
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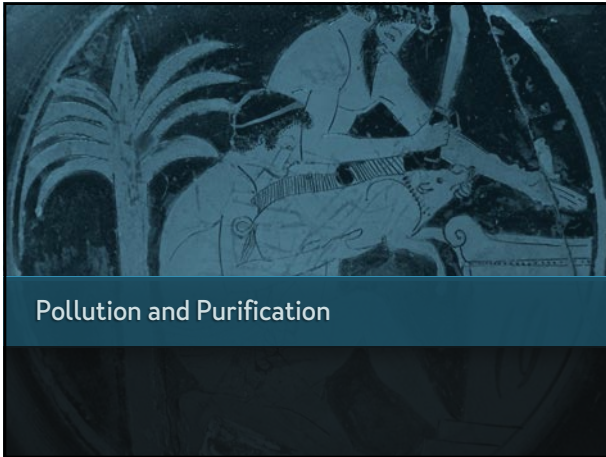
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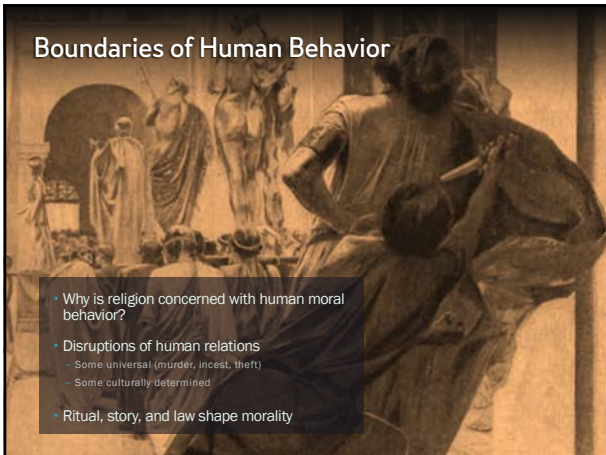
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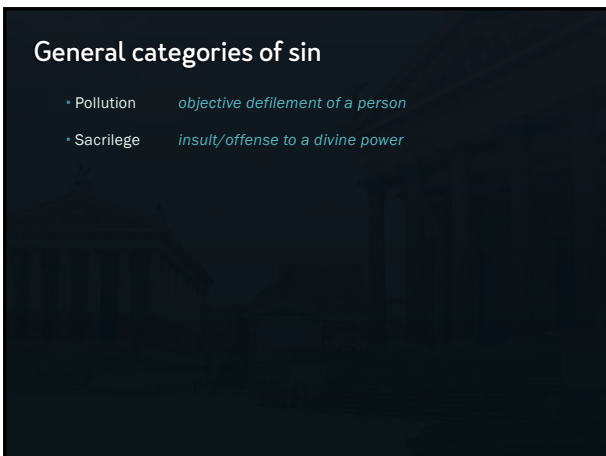
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### Pollution

- Contact with offensive substance that renders a person unclean
- Bodily substances, transformations, decay
  - Blood, semen, rotting flesh
  - Skin diseases
  - Birth, death, sex
  - Sight of the corrupt (dead bodies)
  - Certain animals considered unclean
- Unavoidable for most people
- Ritual impurity may be a religious duty
  - Procreative sex
  - Burial of the dead

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### Consequences of pollution

- Unfit to participate in interactions with gods
- Affects others around wrongdoer as well
- Destruction to land, society, culture

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### Sacrilege

- Defilement of something sacred to a god
- Major or minor slights can result in wrath
  - Neglect of ritual
  - Carrying off daughter of a priest
  - Defilement of a temple
  - Misuse of sacred animals, objects
  - Abuse of a deity's name or status
- Fearsome response (to national destruction)
- Human suffering evidence of wrath and therefore of sin
  - Plagues, drought, famine, military defeat

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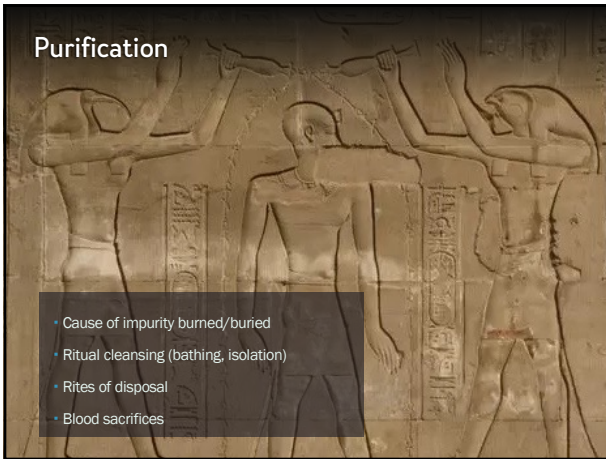
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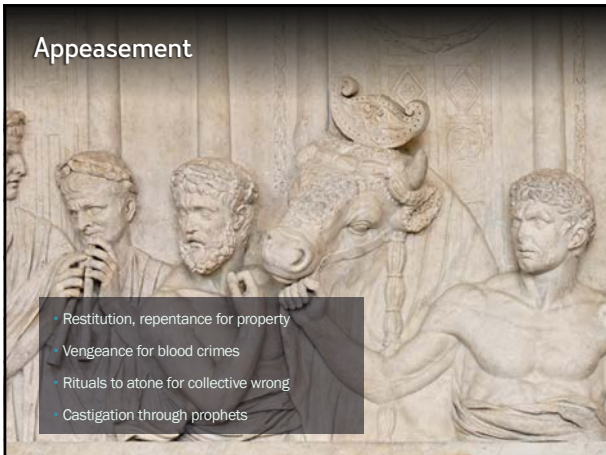
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