

# **RELI 080: Religion and Writing in the Ancient World**



Few technological innovations have more profoundly shaped the course of human civilization than the invention of writing. This course explores the role of writing in the development of ancient religious traditions, covering the wide chronological period from the beginnings of writing in Mesopotamia and Egypt (approximately 3200 BCE) to the advent of Islam. We will begin by considering the nature of writing both as a technology and as a symbolic system, giving attention to insights coming out of modern linguistic research. Then we will examine a series of case studies of the relationship between religion and writing drawn from the ancient world (especially the ancient Near East), in order to illustrate the diversity and complexity of these interactions between technology and society. Specific topics to be addressed include: religion and the early alphabet, magical and mystical uses of writing, religion and literacy, scribal culture, and the development of “scriptural” texts such as the Bible and the Qur’an.

**Professor Joseph Lam**

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**Tuesdays & Thursdays**

**9:30AM-10:45AM**

**General Education  
Requirements:  
HS, WB**

