

Autumn 2022
HISTORY 2704 WATER: A HUMAN HISTORY
Professor Nicholas Breyfogle (.1) WF 9:35AM - 10:55AM



We live on the “blue planet.” Our bodies are made up primarily of water. Without water, life as we understand it could not exist. Indeed, water stands at the foundation of most of what we do as humans. The control of water is at the foundation of the rise and fall of civilizations. Water serves as a source of power and access to water often defines (or is defined by) social and political power hierarchies. Water lies at the very heart of almost all world religions and plays an important symbolic role in the creation of works of literature, art, music, and architecture. It also serves as an important source of human beauty and spiritual tranquility. **Thus, to begin to understand ourselves as humans—our bodies, minds, and souls, past and present—we must contemplate our relationship to water.**

At the same time, water resources will likely represent one of the most complicated dilemmas of the twenty-first century, as many analysts now think that the world will fight over water more than any other resource in the coming decades. **The moral and logistical question of how to ration water (who gets what and for what purposes) will be a foundational ethical question of the twenty-first century.**

In this class, we will examine a selection of historical moments and themes to explore the relationship between people and water over time and place. The format of the course will be a combination of lectures, in-class discussions, workshop activities, and presentation of your work to fellow classmates.