

Religion Scholar Discusses Influence of Ancient Religion on Current Beliefs at UNH April 18

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DURHAM, N.H. , Sarah Iles Johnston, professor of Greek, Latin and religious studies at Ohio State University and a widely published expert on ancient magic and ritual, will speak on the practices and beliefs of a late antique religious group that is believed to have influenced the Christian idea of "guardian angels" Thursday, April 18, at 6:30 p.m. in the University of New Hampshire's Memorial Union Building, room 330-332.

The lecture is presented by UNH's Religious Studies Program, and is free and open to the public.

In her lecture, "Working Overtime in the Afterlife: Philosophy, Magic, and Death in the Ancient Practices of Theurgy," Johnston will discuss the ways in which the theurgists attempted to justify and validate their religious beliefs by recourse to scientific knowledge of the time, an interesting idea because it defies an assumption still held by many today that science and religion don't mix.

Johnston also will talk about the way theurgists imagined the afterlife as a place where the blessed soul would be rewarded with the chance to continue working for the benefit of humanity as a whole. This is believed to have influenced the Christian idea of guardian angels and more broadly the Christian idea that angels exist mainly to help human beings. Johnston will explain how this is very different from earlier Mediterranean beliefs about what happened to good people after they died.

Johnston is author of "Hekate Soteira," a book about the

ancient "magic" goddess Hekate, and "Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece."

For more information on the lecture, call David Frankfurter, director of UNH's Religious Studies Program, at (603) 862-3015. For directions, visit <http://www.unhmub.com/infocenter/directions.html>.

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