

RELI 617

Death and Afterlife in the Ancient World



In this upper-level seminar we will examine practices and discourses pertaining to death and the afterlife in the ancient civilizations of Near East, Greece, and Rome.

We will explore various ways in which ancient religions imagined death and its sinister associates (e.g., sleep, old age, evil, irrationality) and recapture some of the feelings experienced in dealing with physical death, ranging from pessimism and nihilistic denial through an invitation to make the most of the present life, to the hope of individual survival after death. We will also identify some of the customs, rituals and institutions that helped ancient people cope with death, imprison it in ceremony, and even transform it into spectacle. Readings include myths about the origin of death, ancient Near Eastern poems of hope and despair, ancient Greek and Roman stories of near-death experiences and otherworldly journeys, Jewish and early Christian discourses on resurrection, and philosophical meditations on death and immortality.

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Tuesdays & Thursdays
2:00PM - 3:15PM

General Education Requirements: PH, WB

