

MA Cultural Astronomy and Astrology 2017- 18

Compulsory Modules

Contents

Introduction to Cultural Astronomy and Astrology	1
Researching Contemporary Cosmologies	4
History of Astrology	8
Dissertation	10

Introduction to Cultural Astronomy and Astrology

This module provides a foundation to the subject area – astrology, astronomy and cosmology and their cultural consequences and contexts. We examine some of the main issues and deal with some of the fundamental approaches to academic research in the Humanities. The first step is to investigate what we mean by ‘culture’, by no means a simple question. We then explore cosmology in its more traditional aspects, as view of our place in the cosmos which shapes human behaviour, examine views and perspectives on astrology, and investigate the foundations of western astrology and cosmology in the classical texts of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. Our emphasis is on the West, but we touch on other, global, traditions. We go on to introduce the new subject of Cultural Astronomy which includes archaeoastronomy, the use of astronomy in the arts (including literature and the visual arts), religion and politics. We also examine the meaning and definition of related topics such as myth and magic and what is a symbol, investigate the meanings of fate and determinism, and look at the theory of ‘enchantment’. We also look at theories of modernism and post-modernism, within which much contemporary culture is framed, in order to examine modern attitudes to astrology and cosmology.

Introduction Module Weekly Classes

Week 1. Culture and Cosmos

We begin by examining the meanings of the word ‘culture’, as a preparation for relating it to our core subject material – the sky, the planets, the stars and the cosmos. Is the sky perceived as the same in all cultures, or do different cultures have different skies?

Week 2. Philosophy: Soul, Psyche and the Classical Cosmos

This week examines the foundations of western astronomy, astrology and cosmology in classical philosophy, touching on such areas as fate, destiny and the soul’s ascent to the stars. The ideas we introduce may be part of western thought but parallels can often be found in other cultures.

Week 3. Astrology and Culture

This week’s question is ‘what is astrology’? Astrology turns out to be a diverse set of ideas and practices which occurs in most cultures and is based around the shared notion that the planets, the stars and the cosmos have a meaningful relationship with human affairs. We explore the disputed definition of astrology and the competing theories which explain whether and how it works. We also introduce criticisms of astrology, dating back to the classical period, both from astrologers and non-astrologers.

Week 4. Cosmology and Culture

What is cosmology? According to a narrow definition it is the scientific study of the cosmos. However, the cosmos is defined as everything that exists, so it is impossible to maintain a narrow definition. We explore the idea of cosmology as the way in which people relate to the cosmos – or to their idea of the cosmos. We also explore traditional concepts such as the theory of ‘sympathies’ which link all things in the cosmos.

Week 5. Astronomy and Culture

This week we introduce the new discipline of cultural astronomy. This discipline began in the 1970s as a means of providing cultural context for the study of astronomy in ancient cultures, but can be equally applied to modern society. We can even ask whether modern astronomy itself both arises from and contributes to, culture. We also touch on questions of astronomy and literature and the arts.

Week 6. Myth and Magic in the Cosmos

If myth is the telling of stories about the cosmos, and magic is active engagement with the cosmos, then both form an integral part of traditional – and modern – astrologies. We consider the meanings of myth and magic, their relationship to ritual and we introduce the concept of enchantment.

Week 7. Fate and Freewill in the Cosmos

At some point in the distant past human beings were struck by two observations. One was that human life is linked to the sky, the most obvious manifestation being the sun's light and heat, without which life would not exist. The other was the observation of regularity and order in the sky: the sun rises and sets every day without fail. Is, then, human life ordered in the same way? From their earliest origins, cosmology, astronomy and astrology have been concerned with the extent to which human affairs are fated and the ways, if any, in which freedom of choice may be exercised. This week's class considers the meanings of fate, free will and determinism in relation to cosmology, astronomy and astrology.

Week 8. Philosophy: the Modern World

This week we consider the current debates concerning directions in which culture, especially in the modern west, has been travelling since the 19th century, and questions of modernism and post-modernism. We look at theories that contemporary astrology is postmodern and that cosmology can be postmodern. We also look at the alternative – that we have never been modern!

Required Books (these books should be purchased or borrowed for the module):

Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology*, Vol. 1, The Ancient World (London: Continuum 2008), and Vol. 2 (The Medieval and Modern Worlds, London: Continuum 2009) (NB Vol. 1 was originally published as *The Dawn of Astrology*, London: Continuum, 2008).

Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*, New York: New York University Press, 2012.

Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene, *Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2011).

Roy Willis and Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

Recommended Books (these books deal with wider issues and provide useful background)

Brady, Bernadette, *Cosmos, Chaosmos and Astrology: rethinking the nature of astrology* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press 2014)

Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell 2000),

Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene (eds), *Sky and Symbol* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre

Press, 2013).

Nicholas Campion (ed.) *Cosmologies: Proceedings of the Seventh Sophia Centre Conference, 2009* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2010).

Nicholas Campion (ed.), *Heavenly Discourses* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2016).

Nicholas Campion and Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum (eds), *Astrology in Time and Place: Cross-Cultural Currents in the History of Astrology*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

Darrellyn Gunzburg (ed.)

Stanley Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990),

Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (London: MacMillan 1991),

Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe, *Oracles and Divination*, (Boulder: Shambhala 1981).

Sample Assessment (this may change from year to year)

Students in all modules write essays totalling 5000 words in each module, and the titles may change from year to year. In this module there are two essays:

Essay 1.

Write a 1500 word critical review and comparison of two academic papers from the JSTOR archive which you have found using one of the two following combinations of keyword searches: (1) 'Cosmology' and 'Culture', OR (2) 'Astrology' and 'Culture', OR 'Astronomy' and 'Culture'.

JSTOR is the archive of thousands of academic articles which is accessible to students via the University.

Essay 2.

Write a 3500-word essay on one of the following titles:

A. Discuss how classical notions of soul are reflected in astrology.

B. 'The stars incline; they do not compel.' Discuss this statement in relation to the theory and practice of astrology.

C. Consider the role of sky myth in two different cultures.

D. Are perceptions of the cosmos culturally conditioned?

E. Using at least two examples from the scholarly literature, consider the cultural implications of astronomical cycles.

Researching Contemporary Cosmologies

This module focuses on the contemporary world – the here and now. Everyone has a cosmology – a way of understanding the way the cosmos works, and their place in it. This module looks at how people around us understand the cosmos. This module allows students to pursue a supervised research project looking at attitudes to the sky, astrology or astronomy using trains them in simple research techniques - interviews and/or questionnaires – in order to gather and interpret data. The module encourages students to develop their own perspective on the nature, role and function of ideas, stories and beliefs about the sky, and practices derived from such beliefs, as conveyed in astrology, astronomy and cosmology in the modern world. We will also introduce more advanced approaches such as ‘participant observation’, and will raise the problem of the role of the researcher, looking at whether we are ‘insiders’ or ‘outsiders’ in any practice or world-view, and consider the importance of reflexivity and how to recognise and deal with our own biases and preconceptions.

Required Books (books to buy or borrow for the module)

Alan Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2001) (this is available to students as an e-book),
Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project: a Guide for First Time Researchers* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2014)

Recommended Books

There is a wide range of recommended background books, some of which relate to research into cosmology, astronomy and astrology, and others which deal with research issues.

Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2012);
William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson, *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (London: Sage 1998),
Charlotte Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: a Guide to Researching Our Selves and Others* (London: Routledge, 1999);
Susan Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld: An Anthropology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000),
Russell McCutcheon, *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London: Cassell, 1999).
Luis Rodolfo Vilhena, *The World of Astrology: An Ethnography of Astrology in Contemporary Brazil*, Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2014.

Sample Assessment (this may change from year to year)

There are two essays in this module

1. Written Assignment 1 (20% of total marks)

Write a 1,000-word essay comparing and contrasting two of the following papers:
Bennett, G. 1995. “If I Knew You were Coming I’d Have Baked a Cake”: The Folklore of Foreknowledge in a Neighborhood Group. In *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, edited by Barbara Walker, 122-142. Logan, Utah: Utah University Press.
Blain, J. 2000. ‘Speaking Shamanistically: Seidr, Academia and Rationality’. In *DISKUS* Volume 6 (2000).

Brink, T. L. 1978. 'Inconsistency of Belief among Roman Catholic Girls: Concerning Religion, Astrology, Reincarnation.' *Review of Religious Research*, 20, 82-85.

Walter, T. & Waterhouse, H. 1999. 'A Very Private Belief: Reincarnation in Contemporary England'. *Sociology of Religion*, 60, 187-197.

2. Written Assignment 2 (80% of total marks)

You will submit a 4,000-word report of a research project you have conducted into attitudes to, belief in, or practices associated with, contemporary astrology, astronomy or cosmology (see below). You select the topic of your research project from one of the following projects while bearing in mind that your project must related to the sky or cosmos in some way. You will be provided with staff supervision and reading suggestions.

A. Cosmology

Project 1, Personal Cosmologies (Beliefs)

Freya Mathews wrote, 'Cosmologies are not of course pulled out of the air to suit the convenience of the communities to which they are attached. They are conditioned by many and various historical, environmental, technological, psychological and social factors. A flourishing community is likely to evolve a bright, self-affirming cosmology, and a languishing community is likely to see the world in darker shades... A good cosmology, in other words, is good for its adherents'.¹ In Chapter 2 of his *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*, Nicholas Campion references such concepts as cosmogony, cosmophilia, cosmophobia and cosmovision, and develops the idea that all of us have a personal cosmology, or cosmovision, a set of beliefs about the way the cosmos is and works, and how we fit into it.²

In this project you will, with a particular group of people, explore Campion's idea that we all have a view about the cosmos, as well as Mathews' view that such a personal cosmology can reflect the individual's attitude to life. To do this you will build a literature review, relate the views and opinions you have collected back to the literature and then provided a finding.

For the module we define such personal cosmologies as any personal beliefs which encompass the sky or cosmos. Thus such notions might typically include issues as whether a group believe the universe is essentially benign or hostile, whether it has a purpose or patterns and whether this extends to individuals. Hence, for example, a belief in aliens from space, or a belief in angels from the sky, a belief in cloud

¹ Mathews, Freya, *The ecological self* (London: Routledge, 1991). p. 109

² Campion, N., 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*, New York and London: New York

University Press

divination, or a belief in the need for space exploration are all topics that fit into this definition.

Project 2: What are the things and/or practices that represent or embody a cosmology? How are they used? What is their role?

Both rituals and material objects are used in a wide variety of ways in relation to cosmologies. Sometimes they form active and central focal points of cosmological structures (religious statues and images, sacred places), while other times they play more symbolic or passive roles. 'Things' and practices can also form parts of superstitions where they are thought to bring or add luck to situations. Grimes says,

'Each cosmos has its characteristic lilt: If your universe is a womb, your rites go rotund; they moan, slip, slide. If your universe is an orderly, law-abiding, clocklike place looked after by a kindly watch-maker who prefers really, really big grandfather clocks, your rites will run regular as clockwork, be performed as if ritual were, by definition, repetitive, orderly, stately, vertical, by the book.'³

This project therefore seeks to address the 'objects' and rituals/practices that are associated with, represent, or 'embody' elements of cosmology related to the sky. Groups or individual participants can be interviewed re engagement and cosmological views surrounding these objects. This is then related back to the literature provided. Thus, for example, activities at stone circles, public opinions on skyscrapers, or personal habits around the new moon fit all into this project.

B. The Sky

Project 3: Living with the sky (Daily Life)

Tim Ingold argues that our view of the world is altered by living most of our life indoors, inside and that we lack contact with the 'outside'.⁴ Additionally Nicholas Campion points out that the sky has always held a sense of awe and wonder for humanity.⁵ Thus do contemporary humans still seek a connection to the sky and the outside?

This research project allows you to select a group of people and explore, in some manner, their relationship to the sky and take your findings and relate it back to the literature provided. An example of this could be people who plant by the moon.

C. Astrology

Project 4: What do astrologers believe? (The insider perspective)

In 1932 the philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) asked the question about astrologers:

Do they believe themselves in the sciences that they profess? This is a difficult question. Everything marvellous is believed by some people, and it is not improbable that professional astrologers are of this type. And even if they are

³ Grimes, Ronald, 2002. "Performance is Currency in the Deep World's Gift Economy: An Incantatory Riff for a Global Medicine Show". *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. Vol. 9, Issue 1, pp. 150-163. p.159

⁴ Ingold, T. (2007). 'Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13, pp.19-38.

⁵ Campion, N. (2008). *The Dawn of Astrology. A Cultural History of Western Astrology, The Ancient and Classical Worlds*, London, UK, Continuum Books. p.5.

*aware that their own performances are largely guesswork and inferences from information obtained otherwise, they probably think that there are superior practitioners who never resort to these inferior methods.*⁶ You should design a research project that seeks to answer, in a small way, Russell's question. Your target group will be practicing astrologers. You can also draw on Chapter 12 of Nick Campion's PhD thesis in the MA CAA Online library which examines beliefs amongst contemporary astrologers. You will also need to read Chapter 8, which discusses the meaning of 'belief'. You should also read Chapter 7 of Bernadette Brady's PhD which reports on her questionnaire findings on what astrologers believe about fate.

Project 5: What do people think about astrology? (The outsider perspective)

James Davidson suggests that people like astrology because it keeps them linked to the sky, in 2004 he wrote in the London Review of Books, Vol. 26 No 23. 2 December 2004

I don't believe in astrology but I am rather fond of it. In the first place I like to be reminded that things are happening in the solar system. If Neil Spencer didn't tell me in the Observer that Mercury is 'retrograde' – i.e. moving up to overtake us on the inside lane – I would have no idea that Mercury was doing anything at all in our blinded night sky, going forwards, going backwards, or indulging in figures of eight. Anything could be happening out there. The Earth could be lost in space.

This research project uses Davidson's comments to explore how people think about astrology. You can draw on Chapters ten and eleven of Nicholas Campion's PhD thesis in the MA CAA Online library, as well as the PhD thesis of Alie Bird, Bernadette Brady all of which are in the online library.

Your Own Project

Project 6: If you have a clear idea of a project that you wish to undertake and

- a) it fits into the subject matter of the module and
- b) you already have the academic rational and
- c) you already have the supporting literature

Ⓔ <http://www.personal.kent.edu/~rmuhamma/Philosophy/RBwritings/HearstColumns/onAstrologer.htm>;
Accessed 13 August 2013.

History of Astrology

This module examines the history of western astrology from its origins in Mesopotamia through its transmission from Greece, Egypt and classical Rome to the Middle Ages and Renaissance, its decline in the seventeenth century and its revival in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We consider detail but also focus on broad themes such as astrology's origins and periods of decline and reform. Students can consider astrology's 'internal' development, that is, the evolution of its symbolism and technique and what these indicate views of time and the cosmos, and its 'external' development, that is, its relationship to technological, social, religious and political events. We pay particular attention to the philosophical context, including the survival of classical learning and pagan imagery in medieval and Renaissance Europe, the challenge of the Enlightenment to the medieval world view and questions of modernism in the twentieth century. The focus is on the western tradition from Mesopotamia through Greece to Europe, because this is where most of the sources and scholarship are but we encourage students to consider other cultures, and can recommend suitable reading.

Required Books (these books must be purchased or borrowed for the module):

Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology*, Vol 1, The Ancient World (London: Continuum 2008), Vol 2 (The Medieval and Modern Worlds, London: Continuum 2009) (NB Vol 1 was originally published as *The Dawn of Astrology*, London: Continuum, 2008).

Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*, New York: New York University Press (pub. May 2012).

Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2012).

Richard Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books 1997)

Recommended Books:

Charles Burnett and Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum (eds), *From Masha'allah to Kepler: Theory and Practice in Medieval and Renaissance Astrology* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2015)

Nicholas Campion and Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, *Astrology in Time and Place: Cross-Cultural Currents in the History of Astrology*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

Jim Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Boydell 1987).

Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Penguin 1973).

Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, (8 Vols, New York: Columbia University Press, 1923 – 58)

Sample Assessment (this may change from year to year)

Assignment 1 (40% of marks)

1 Write a 2000 word essay, focusing on one astrological planet, or zodiac sign/constellation, exploring its use and description in at least three primary sources. You are expected to compare and contrast uses of the same astrological planet, or zodiac sign/constellation, showing an awareness of the philosophical context within which it was written. The purpose of this exercise is to engage you with the use of the primary sources, that is, original documents produced by astronomers or astrologers (not academic books or articles). These texts may be, for example,

accounts of celestial or star myths, hymns or prayers to celestial bodies or planetary deities, guides to astrological interpretation, or interpretations of horoscopes. ONE of your three primary documents MUST BE ANCIENT (from before 500 CE) and ONE MUST BE MODERN (19TH, 20TH or 21ST century).

Assignment 2 (60% of marks)

2. Write a 3000 word essay on one of the following topics:

- 1 Write a critical biography of one astrologer.
2. Considering two attempts to reform astrology, compare and contrast the competing priorities involved in each.
3. Did Babylonian astrology die out in the classical world?
4. Discuss the role of astrology in the European medieval world using at least two primary sources from either literature or art.
5. To what extent are narratives of predestination a feature of western or other astrology?
6. Discuss the Greek contribution to astrology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
7. Consider the impact of non-western astrology (for example, Persian, Islamic, Indian, Chinese) on western astrology in the post-classical world (after 500 CE).

Dissertation

Following the successful completion of six modules are allowed to write a 15,000 word dissertation based on independent research within the subject area. You may examine any area of the history or modern culture of astrology, explore the myths, images and iconography of astronomy, or investigate the relationship between culture and cosmology. You may look at the past or present, the west, or non-western cultures. The scope is wide!

First of all you will work out a research proposal containing an academic rationale (how does it fit into previous scholarship?), describing a rough plan, and setting out the major primary sources (original documents) and secondary sources (scholarly works) which you plan to use. You will receive advice while you are doing this and, once you have a workable project, you will be assigned a supervisor with whom you can keep in touch by skype and email.

We also run video-conferencing seminars, usually around every six weeks, at which staff give short presentations and students have a chance to give updates on their work.

When you have successfully completed your Dissertation you will be awarded the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology.

Recent dissertation topics include:

- Jung & the Birth of Psychological Astrology
- Astrology in the Greek Magical Papyri
- To what extent is 20th-century German astrology psychological?
- Archaeoastronomy and the Stone-age Maltese temples at Mnajdra
- Omar Khayyam and Astrology
- The modern appeal of the stone circle at Stanton Drew
- The influence of Marsilio Ficino on western astrology
- An investigation into the relationship between the feminine divine and the New Age
- Celestial alignments in the Neolithic mounds in the Cotswold Region
- Astrology in Sufi doctrines
- Dante's Divine Comedy as a true cosmological journey. An esoteric, analogical, transpersonal interpretation
- Has the cosmology of the post-Jungian psychologist James Hillman influenced the contemporary practice of astrology?
- Zoroastrian cosmology, the Jupiter-Saturn cycle and its implementation in modern astrology
- Japanese astrology (Yin-Yang study) and empirical science
- An investigation into astrologers' beliefs concerning the relationship between astrology and spiritual/moral concepts
- An examination of theories of light in relation to the practice of astrology
- Heaven in the early history of Western religions
- A Comparative Study of the Divination with I Ching in China during the Han Period and the Divination with Astrology in Rome during the Hellenistic Period
- Outer planets cycles in Persia and the current Uranus-Pluto square

- Dark Skies and the Channel Islands
- The development of psychological astrology in 20th century Germany
- Ancient theories of myth and catastrophe from the skies.