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Abstract

The practice of *astrology* can be traced in most if not all human societies, in most time periods. Astrology has prehistoric origins and flourishes in the modern world, where it may be understood as a form of ethnoastronomy – astronomy practiced by the people. The Western tradition, which originated in

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Mesopotamia and was developed in the Greek world, has been most studied by academics. However, India is also home to a tradition which has survived in a continuous lineage for 2,000 years. Complex systems of astrology also developed in China and Mesoamerica, while all other human societies appear to seek social and religious meaning in the stars.

Introduction

Astrology, from the Greek, *astro-logos*, is the assumption that the stars and planets contain meaning and significance for terrestrial affairs. *Logos* is simply translated as “word”, so astrology is, then, the “word” of the stars: the stars “speak”. However, in the context of classical thought, we may also consider that the stars possess reason or a kind of logic that can provide important information. Until the seventeenth century, the word was frequently interchangeable with astronomy, the “regulation” or “law” of the stars. Most non-Western countries do not employ different words to distinguish traditional astronomy from astrology, except where the distinction has been imported from the modern West. In India, both are *jyotish*, the “science of light”; in Japan, they are *onmyōdō*, the “yin-yang way”; and in China, *li fa* (calendar systems) and *tian wen* (sky patterns) are suitable terms (Campion 2008, 2012a, p. 100). Astrology appears to be a universal feature of human culture and may be understood as a form of cultural astronomy; an important contribution to the understanding of astronomy’s cultural uses, applications, uses, and functions; and an indication of society’s attitudes to the stars. Ruggles (2005, pp. 24–25) observes that human societies from modern indigenous communities back to prehistoric times have perceived direct associations between celestial and terrestrial events. The term “indigenous astronomy” tends to be used as a synonym for astrology by academics studying cultural astronomy in non-Western and premodern societies. Astrology is also a central feature of Hindu and traditional Chinese culture and flourishes in the modern West, where it is an accepted part of popular culture as well as having a significant place in place in New Age and Esoteric circles (Campion 2009, pp. 239–249; 2012b, pp. 51–68).

The term astrology is controversial in the modern West. As Ruggles (2005, p. 24) points out, it is “anathema” to modern astronomers. It is heavily criticized by the organized skeptic community and evangelical Christians who share the opinion that it can be dangerous (Campion 2012b, p. 267). The historiography of astrology has been shaped by disputes over its correct interpretation, mainly by whether a narrow or wide definition should be taken. Much of the literature is influenced by David Pingree’s statement that astrology is fundamentally Aristotelian and therefore only possible within the context of Greek culture and its intellectual descendants. Pingree (1973, p. 118) defined astrology as:

the study of the impact of the celestial bodies - Moon, Sun, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the fixed stars and sometimes the lunar nodes - upon the sublunar world... The influence of the celestial bodies is variously considered to be absolutely determinative of all motions of the four sublunar elements.

Pingree's definition may be defined as "exclusive" because it excludes such phenomena as divinely inspired astral omens or an astrology of acausal connections as proposed by Plato. Pingree's exclusive definition has been challenged by younger scholars, such as Curry (1999), who have proposed inclusive definitions, in which a greater range of beliefs and practices can be included under the rubric "astrology". Curry (1999, p. 55) considers that "Astrology is the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth, and the tradition that has thus been generated". Note that Curry emphasizes the word "practice" rather than the more common "belief", or Pingree's "study". Hence, astrology is conceived as something which people "do", and the action becomes more important than any underlying belief system or ideology. Ruggles (2005, p. 25) emphasizes action and considers it a consequence of belief.

The term astrology can be applied to three rather different but not entirely separable ways of in which people have perceived connections between the configuration of the heavens and events on earth: the belief that particular celestial configurations can portend future events; the belief that they can determine or influence the characteristics and lives of people, most commonly at their moment of birth; and the belief that they are directly connected to (that is, influence and/or reflect) current terrestrial events. Each type of perceived connection could provoke a variety of actions in response to certain observed celestial events.

In this sense, the definition of astrology has a substantial overlap with that of archaeoastronomy, defined by Ruggles (2005, p. 19) as "the study of beliefs and practices concerning the sky in the past, and especially in prehistory, and the uses to which people's knowledge of the skies were put". Inclusive definitions of astrology can there extend the word's scope to encompass omen divination, astral magic, sacred calendars, and farming calendars.

Typologies and Branches of Astrology

Astrology can be broadly divided into "cosmic" and "chaotic" types (Campion 2012a, p. 23). Cosmic astrologies are highly codified and allow for complex judgments regarding action, timing, and prediction. The principal exemplars are the Greek form which developed in the Hellenistic world between the third and first centuries BCE and which is represented in both Indian and medieval and modern Western astrology. Chaotic astrology is less codified than cosmic and is technically simple and more flexible in interpretation. Central to an understanding of astrology's diversity in the Western tradition is the distinction between "natural" and "judicial" astrology, which originates in classical discourse in the first century BCE (Campion 2012a, p. 16). Natural astrology requires no more than the observation of seasonal phenomena and natural influences deriving from the planets and was universally accepted in the medieval and Renaissance worlds. Judicial astrology, requiring the astrologer's interpretative judgement, depended on complex deductions made from *horoscopes*, schematic maps of the sky cast for a precise time, place, and date. Late classical judicial astrology was typologically divided into four branches, which were adopted in medieval

Europe and India: genethliology (modern natal astrology) dealt with individual character and destiny usually (but not always) based on the time, date, and place of birth; interrogations (modern horary astrology) answered questions based on the exact time and place that the question had been asked; revolutions (modern mundane astrology) considered history and politics; and elections established the most auspicious moment to initiate new enterprises. To this list, we could also add astrological magic, which relies on ritual acts undertaken at auspicious moments in order to engage with and influence spiritual affairs and material existence.

Also of relevance to Western astrology is Curry's (1989) hierarchical, sociological model of three forms of astrology forming a rough analogy with the three social groups, upper, middle, and lower classes. The first, high astrology, is the astrology of the philosophers and theologians; the second, middling astrology, is characterized by the professional casting and interpretation of horoscopes, a practice requiring a considerable level of literary study and mathematical skill; the third, low astrology, is the astrology of street fortune tellers of almanacs (after the fifteenth century) and, in the modern world, newspaper and magazine "sun-sign columns". Although developed in relation to Europe, Curry's model can equally be applied to the Islamic world, India, and China.

Function

In a traditional context, as a practice, astrology is best understood through its functions. It has been called both a system of anthropology and sociology in the sense that its purposes include the understanding of human nature and the organization of society. Prediction of the future, one of astrology's primary functions, makes sense only in a context in which action in the present can be changed in order to alter the outcome of such predictions, a point made in the second century by Claudius Ptolemy (1940). In this sense, sociologically, astrology's purpose is management of the present in order to preserve harmony between the sky and Earth and maintain peace and stability. This aim is achieved partly through the alignment of sacred calendars with solar and lunar cycles and the practice of attendant rituals. For example, in the Hebrew calendar, Pesach, or Passover, commenced as the full Moon appeared in the eastern horizon on the fourteenth day of the first month following the spring equinox. The timing of Passover corresponds to the great Babylonian new year festival, the Akitu, and was converted into the Christian Easter. By the fourth century, Christianity had located Christ's birth on 25 December, the feast day of Sol Invictus, the Roman "Unconquered Sun", immediately after the winter solstice. Solar calendar rituals were celebrated with great devotion in the Inca empire. A solar, harvest-festival ritual which took place in Cuzco in 1535 was attended by 600 magnificently dressed nobles:

They stood in two rows, each of which was made up of over three hundred lords. It was like a procession, some on one side and the others on the other, and they stood very silent, waiting for sunrise. When the sun had not yet fully risen, they began slowly and in great order and harmony to intone a chant; and as they sang they each moved forward. . . and as the sun went in rising, so their song intensified. . . and so they sang from the time when the sun rose until it had completely set. And since until noon the sun was rising, they

heightened their voices, and after noon they slowly softened them, always in step with the movement of the sun. (MacCormack 1991, pp. 75–76).

In China, the New Year corresponds to the New Moon in the Western zodiac sign Aquarius. The Chinese New Year, exported to the “Chinatowns” which have been created in order to market Chinese shops and restaurants in the great cities of the Western world, from London to San Francisco, has become a feature of the late-modern commodification of Chinese culture.

In the classical world, astrology also developed soteriological functions offering a means for salvation of the soul by preparing for its ascent to the stars after death. The most notable example was the Mysteries of Mithras, which flourished in the Roman Empire (Beck). In the modern West, self-understanding is widely regarded as astrology’s key function by its protagonists (Campion 2012b, pp. 167–186). Astrology as the identification of meanings can also point to the function of astronomy as the measurement of the stars. For example, according to McCluskey (1993, p. 427), “To the extent that in the high cultures of Mesoamerica cosmologies are tied to a predictive astronomy, these astronomies are arithmetical rather than geometrical and they are concerned with the prediction of the dates of astronomically and astrologically significant events”. For Aveni (1992, p. 4), the Mayan astronomical texts were “purely astrological” in their function and intent.

Fundamental Hypotheses

A number of major theoretical bases for astrology can be identified.

Divine Intervention and Communication

God or gods and goddesses communicate with humanity via the stars, giving notice of their intentions. This is the standard model in most cultures, notably in Mesopotamia, the origin of both most modern Western and Indian astrology (Campion 2012a, pp. 110–134). For example, in the Old Testament, Amos (8.9) prophesies “‘And on that day’, says the Lord God, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight.’” In the New Testament, Acts 2.19–21 prophesied, “And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke;/ The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day/ And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”.

Interconnectedness

Ruggles (2005, p. 27) states that astrology is based on the assumption of the “interconnectedness of things”. A common analogy is of a mirror, in which sky

and Earth reflect each other: there is no need for a causal connection between planets and terrestrial affairs, but if there is, the effects are reciprocal and human actions may affect the sky as much as the sky affects human activity. The concept of interconnectedness was formalized into the notion of “sympathy” in classical Stoic physics. According to this theory, all things contain more or less sympathy with all other things by virtue of their essential nature. In Greek astrology, for example, the Sun relates to kings, gold, pride, and the heart, and Mars to soldiers, blood, the color red, and fevers, as a result of real interconnections between these things. This system underpinned astrological medicine and magic and was gradually codified into a complex scheme which was termed the “Great Chain of Being” by Lovejoy (1936). Interconnectedness may also function mathematically, drawing on the Pythagorean notion that the universe is understood through number. In this sense, the stars and planets are not agents of change but indicators of a common mathematical order which applies equally to both sky and Earth.

Synchronicity

Time is an ordering principle in which, as both terrestrial and celestial affairs follow the same processes and at any one time, patterns in the sky are indicative of conditions on Earth. Connections between Earth and sky may therefore be described as acausal. This notion is central to Chinese astrology, in its concepts of the fluctuating patterns of two corresponding but opposite patterns, yin and yang, and the notion of *tian wen*, or sky patterns (Pankenier 2012). In Aztec culture, the timing of warfare was regulated by the planet Venus, representing the god Quetzalcoatl (Carlson 1993). The phenomenon was complicated: partly the deity gives an instruction, but that the deity’s ability to do so is itself regulated by time; divinity itself can therefore be subject to time. In Persia from around the fifth century onward, time itself was “deified” in the form of the Zoroastrian god Zurvan: time, as in classical Greece, can be understood in two forms: *chronos* is quantified time and *kairos* is qualitative time. Acausality was suggested in Plato’s (1931) fourth-century BCE statement that “Wherefore, as a consequence of this reasoning and design on the part of God, with a view to the generation of Time, the sun and moon and five other stars, which bear the appellation of ‘planets’ [i.e., ‘wanderers’], came into existence for the determining and preserving of the numbers of Time”. The term synchronicity was coined in relation to astrology by C.G. Jung (1875–1961), the founder of analytical psychology in his statement that “Whatever is born or done at this particular moment of time has the quality of this moment of time” (Jung 1971, pp. 56–57).

Causality

The concept of causes is implicit in astrology as divine intervention: not only do gods and goddesses give notice of their intentions, but they actively cause the events of which they warn. Plato identified the planets as secondary causes, acting

not independently but on behalf of the Demiurge, the creator. Causation theory was further developed in the third century BCE by Aristotle (1933) who categorized causes into four types: the efficient cause (an object's maker), the material cause (the matter out of which an object is made), the formal cause (the Platonic "Idea" or "Form" on which an object is based), and the final cause (the future condition toward which an object is moving). Aristotelian cosmology carried into the astrology of the West, the Islamic world and India, the idea that the cause of an event lies in its origin, nature, and future condition. The concept of a cause in the modern sense as the direct impact of object "a" on object "b" plays only a slight role in astrological causality.

Celestial Influence

Aristotle also postulated the existence of motion and light as the transmitters of celestial influence, leading to a naturalistic astrology represented primarily in the work of Claudius Ptolemy (1940) in the second century. The notion of planetary influence was incorporated into Latin natural philosophy by Pliny (1929) who characterized Saturn as cold, Jupiter as warm, the Sun and Mars as hot, and Venus and the Moon as moist.

The Sky as Text

Modern Western astrologers tend to describe astrology as a symbolic language in which the sky is read as a text (Campion 2012b, p. 181). This is a secularization of the model in which divinities send messages through the stars: in Mesopotamia, celestial patterns were the "writing" of the gods and goddesses, or *šitir šamê*, the "writing of heaven" (Rochberg). In China, a star or planet might constitute a *xiang*, an image, symbol, or analogue of some phenomenon on Earth, and the astrologer was therefore required to act as an interpreter, reading the heavenly signs (Pankenier). A double meaning of the term "symbol" is crucial to this justification for astrology (Greene 2010). In modern usage, the word implies that one thing represents another to which it is not related and may have only an arbitrary connection. In this sense, astrology as a symbolic language has no more reality than any other purely representative system. However, in late classical Platonism, symbols in astrology were thought to share the essential nature of the thing they were symbolizing. Hence, if the Sun symbolized the king, the Sun and the king shared something essential in their respective natures.

Fate and Determinism

Astrological prediction is possible because a divine warning of a future event may be given in a divine message. However, reliable prediction of the date and nature of

future events becomes possible when the mathematically understood motions of the stars and planets, once understood, can be projected into the future. Prediction implies determinism that the future is predetermined and therefore cannot be changed. The notion of a total subjection of humanity to a mathematically defined cosmic order is rare and is evident, for example, only in strict forms of Stoicism (Campion 2009, p. 212). Jung followed the Platonic concept that “necessity”, humanity’s subjection to fate, is tempered by a psychic engagement with the cosmos. Such psychic engagement is made possible by Platonic Idealism, which claims that all things in the cosmos are manifestation of Ideas or Forms (later known as Archetypes) which exist in the consciousness of the creator. All things in the universe are therefore connected by psyche, or soul, and the individual’s psyche can interact with the world soul, or Latin *Anima Mundi*, adapted by Jung into the *Collective Unconscious*. Such change may be accomplished by changes in behavior, medical treatment (in the case of disease), prayer, and ritual acts intended to appease divine powers or magically intervene in the order of time. For example, in cases of danger to the king, substitutes might be symbolically enthroned and then killed. In the Renaissance, “sympathetic” magic employed the use of music, color, meditation, and astral iconography to manipulate the cosmos and change the future. “Ritual” magic might involve the casting of spells and the raising of spirits, also at astrologically auspicious moments. There is an important distinction between determinism, which implies an absence of purpose and fate, which involves the fulfilling of a purpose, in Aristotelian terms, a formal or future cause (Brady 2012).

Karl Popper (1957, pp. 210, 244) argued that astrology conforms to the paradoxical philosophy which he termed “activism”, in which an apparently inevitable future results not in passivity in the face of predetermined events but in free choice and increased activity in order to freely bring about the desired future. Activism may also be seen in the negotiation of the future through ritual and prayer and in the deliberate harmonization of Earth and sky in order to maintain peace and stability. For Popper, activism allowed a belief in a predetermined future to be reconciled with free choice.

Case Studies

Astrology and Archaeoastronomy: The Foundation of Cities

There is evidence of the use of astrology to select auspicious moments to found cities from the third century BCE. Tradition records that the cities of Seleucia, Constantinople, and Cairo were founded on astrologically auspicious dates, but the details are uncertain. However, firmer evidence is available for the foundation of Baghdad, which was inaugurated 30 or 31 July 762 (145 AH) as an assertion of the power of the Abbasid caliphate. The city was laid out on cosmic principles (Allawi 1988) including a quadruple system analogous to the cardinal points and a hexagonal scheme identified with the many septenary systems in the ancient world, including the seven planets, the whole envisaged as “a grand cosmic

astrolabe” which “cannot be separated from astrology”. The round city was divided into 12 sections and related to the great circles of the universe, such as the tropics and the equator, as well as to the Sun’s apogee and perigee. As an example, the Sun covers a longer distance when at its perigee (when furthest from the Earth) than at its apogee (when closest to the Earth), and the area of the city corresponding to the Sun’s perigee therefore, Allawi claimed, contained more streets. The foundation of Baghdad was also set for an astrologically auspicious moment.

The horoscope data was given by al-Yaqubi (Pingree 1970) in the ninth century and al-Biruni (1879) in the tenth–eleventh centuries. However, there are uncertainties both in the data and the interpretation of the horoscope (Campion 2013). In particular, although Jupiter, the most beneficial planet in Greek astrology, was in its own sign, Sagittarius, rising on the eastern horizon, and a “trine” aspect (120°) from the Sun in Leo, all of which are powerful and benevolent factors. Mars, a malefic planet, occupied a powerful and destructive position on the Western horizon. There is no textual evidence in the canon of Greek astrology which can mitigate this malign presence, which renders it very unlikely that Greek astrology was the only factor involved. However, in Indian astrology, there is a tradition that when Sagittarius is on the eastern horizon, Mars is no longer a malefic planet but becomes auspicious (Parasara). The conclusion is therefore that Indian astrology was used in the foundation of Baghdad, even if in association with Greek. There is therefore *prima facie* evidence of the importance of Indian cosmology in Islamic thought. A study of the archaeoastronomy of Baghdad, and perhaps of other sites in the Islamic world, might therefore benefit from the study of Indian cosmology.

Astrology and Ethnoastronomy: Native American Astrology

Traditional Native American astronomy was intended to harmonize human life with celestial powers and was largely collective, expressed through the ritual pattern of life (McCluskey). In addition to the calendar ceremonies and positioning of buildings in relation to the sky, there are also accounts of individual relationships with the stars which may be considered astrology in the broad sense. As stars and people were both alive, the relationship between them could be individual and dynamic. For example, if a Skidi Pawnee child is born at night, then the stars are observed, but the only interpretive factor mentioned in the surviving accounts is the weather: a calm night followed by a clear morning signified a healthy, problem-free life, but violent weather indicated the opposite. The relationship continues into adult life. According to one Pawnee informant, “it often happens that when a person goes out on the hills at night to fast and to pray to the powers above, he will, as he is praying, become conscious that a particular star is looking at him” (Fletcher 1903, p. 11). The consequence of being singled out by an individual star in such a manner would invariably be a vision followed by the requirement to implement whatever instructions the star sends. The results might be dangerous. In one incident, a star sent a boy mad. That this was a familiar problem is suggested by the immediacy with which a healing ritual was conducted. The shaman or priest took the boy

outside and waited for the responsible star to rise. When it did so, the boy was painted black, covered in white spots, and wrapped in a fawn skin, and a star was painted on his forehead; the treatment was successful as long as the star remained on his forehead, but when it wore off, his problem returned. In terms of the cosmic-chaotic dichotomy in astrology, this version of Native American astrology is chaotic: it is uncoded, spontaneous, and depends heavily on the ability to respond spontaneously depending in circumstances.

Astrology and Ethnoastronomy: New Zealand

Traditional Polynesian astronomers tended to be divided into two groups: the sky watchers, whose task was to watch for omens, keep the calendar, and arrange rituals and festivals, and the wayfinders, who presided over the knowledge necessary for navigation. The examination of celestial omens conforms to a broad definition of astrology. In New Zealand, the Maori developed a class of experts, *tohunga kokorangi*, who were versed in the entire range of celestial lore, including the measurement of celestial positions and evaluation of their significance; Best (1955) referred to these practices as “natural astrology”. An example of Maori practice includes the following: a lunar occultation – when the Moon passes directly in front of a certain star – is a potentially difficult military omen. If the star reappears when the Moon has passed, it was said, a fort will be captured. One informant reported that “the star knows all about the coming trouble. . . Just before the battle of Orakau we saw this sign..As we were a war party of course our warriors made much of this omen” (Best 1955, p. 68). The *tohunga kokorangi* would watch the sky for omens, communing with celestial deities and purging his soul. If the *tohunga kokorangi* saw a dangerous sign, such as a comet, he would recite ritual formulae in order to defuse the threat and protect his people.

He may even have been actively engaging with the sky, acting as a cocreator, for there was a belief that certain men, with sufficient power, could cause a solar halo to appear at will.

Astrology and Ethnoastronomy: Indian Astrology

In India, astrology, or *jyotish*, is a “vedanga”, one of the “sciences” necessary for understanding the vedas the sacred texts. A vibrant tradition of astrology has survived in India in an unbroken tradition since Greek horoscopic astrology was imported and combined with Hinduism in the first century CE. It remains an active part of Indian life and has both a presence in the temples and in mundane life. It is used at the highest levels of politics: the date and time for Burmese independence in 1948 and the proclamation of the Republic of Sri Lanka in 1971 were chosen on astrological grounds. The most widespread use of astrology is in marriage – to confirm the prospective marriage partner and to arrange the date of the wedding.

Indian astrology's interpretative functions are just one phase in a process in which, as human beings are creations of the cosmos, but not separate to it, they are active participants in it. There is therefore a second stage to the astrological process, which is to engage with whatever information the astrologer has imparted. The omens of future difficulties dispatched by astrological configurations can be dealt with by apotropaic rituals designed to avert a future problem or by prayer, meditation, ritual, *pujas* (purifications), and talismans. The Shwedagon pagoda in Rangoon provides an example in a Buddhist context. Around the base of the central 321-ft-high gilded *stupa* are located eight shrines to the planetary rulers of the days of the week the Sun (Sunday), the Moon (Monday), Mars (Tuesday), Mercury (Wednesday before noon), Rahu (the Moon's north node, Wednesday afternoon), Jupiter (Thursday), Venus (Friday), and Saturn (Saturday). Dispatched by their astrologers, local people engage quietly with one of the planetary shrines, meditating in front of it, contemplating its beauty, making offerings of flowers, and pouring water or milk over it and lighting incense to carry prayers to heaven. The principle is quite simple: if one is suffering from an excess of Mars – a fever perhaps or violent threats or spiritual agitation – one may counter this by performing the appropriate ritual at the Venus shrine, whose nature is calm and peaceful. On another occasion, perhaps, the solution might be to attend to the Mars shrine precisely in order to persuade the Martian principle in the cosmos to call off its threats. There are nine planets in Indian astrology: the seven traditional planets and the Moon's north and south nodes (Rahu and Ketu). The organized planetary rituals are therefore known as *nava* (nine) *graha* (planet) rituals.

Kemper (1980) described a *navagraha* ritual in Sri Lanka. The ritual begins with a prepubescent girl preparing a string of nine-strands, one for each planet, which then protects the client against malign planetary influence or signification. The priest then uses the string to conduct the ceremony while Buddhist monks chant protective verses, which reinforce the auspicious power of the girl and the planets as embodied in the string.

Indian astrology is unique among the highly codified “cosmic” forms in that it survives in a very similar form to that practiced in the second century, unlike China where communism disrupted traditional learning and Europe, where “high” and “middling” astrology almost disappeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The academic study of its claims and practices therefore offers insights into wider Indian culture, as well as to studies of Indian archaeoastronomy.

Astrology and Ethnoastronomy: The Extent of Belief in Astrology in the Modern West

Western astrology survives in a continuous lineage back to second millennium BCE Mesopotamia via the Hellenistic world (Campion 2008). However, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the “high” and “middling” forms (Curry 1989) almost disappeared. Their revival in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has led

to a “detraditionalized” practice which is technically far simpler than its medieval ancestor, as well as the form which is still practiced in India. Western astrology is largely concerned with character description, with some consideration of notions of spiritual development. Campion (2012b, p. 178) considers the greater part of modern Western astrology to be a form of folk or vernacular religion, the beliefs, and practices of the people regardless of the claims of scientific or religious elites. It may also be considered a form of folk, or ethnoastronomy. In this sense, it is a counterpart to the “indigenous” astronomies of the non-Western world.

There is to date only one study of modern Western astrology which takes a combined sociological and anthropological approach, both placing astrology in its societal context and soliciting personal testimony from astrologers (Campion 2012b). Among the problems tackled is the level of belief in astrology in the general population of the UK. Gallup polls generally locate belief in astrology in both the USA and UK at around 25 %. However, when measures such as occasional readership of horoscope columns are used, the figure increases to around 75 %. The usefulness of such figures as indicators of levels of belief, though, is doubtful. Previous sociological and anthropological studies have revealed problems with the notion of belief: people are reluctant to admit to believe in subjects which might be seen as ridiculous, while belief itself is not a fixed state of mind but a shifting, fluid, and highly variable condition. In addition, astrology itself can be defined, as by Curry, as a practice rather than a belief: it is something which people do rather than believe in. Therefore, the questions posed by Campion to selected groups focused on behavior as well as opinion. The results indicated variability and inconsistency, depending on how questions were phrased. For example, among one group, religious studies students at Bath Spa University in England, 89 % knew their “birth sign” and 60 % regarded it as an accurate guide to character, 37 % thought that astrology can make accurate forecasts, 62 % find out the birth sign of a new boy- or girlfriend and value the advice they read in horoscope columns, but only 4 % would alter their behavior according to such advice. The figures indicated a lower acceptance of prediction as opposed to advice giving, combined with an almost complete rejection of the notion of altering one’s behavior in accord with such advice. The conclusion is that attitudes to astrology are nuanced and that there is potential for future understanding of wider social attitudes to astronomy if questions focus on items of behavior and opinion, rather than belief.

Future Directions

Astrology is a universal feature of human society. The study of its theory and practice therefore needs to be included in studies of cultural astronomy and, where appropriate, archaeoastronomy. Modern astrology in India and the West, alongside “indigenous astronomies”, can be considered a folk astronomy or ethnoastronomy, and the study of its practices is a legitimate one for students of cultural astronomy.

Cross-References

- [Greek Cosmology and Cosmogony](#)
- [Inca Astronomy and Calendrics](#)
- [Mesopotamian Celestial Divination](#)
- [Origins of the “Western” Constellations](#)

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