

MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
Archaeoastronomy Module – AHAN7010
Week Description

Week 6: Case Studies – Asia

Purpose of the week

The last four weeks focus on worldwide case studies. Each week your readings will focus on different regions and time-periods, as well as exemplify different “flavours” of archaeoastronomy. This week the focus is on Chinese and Hindu archaeoastronomical research, which is assisted by recourse to the historical record.

Class Description

The first cosmic cities may have appeared in the Indus valley some 4,500 years ago, inspired perhaps by the human urge to live in a cosmos, governed by geometry rather than chaos. For example, the orientation of the Harappan sites to the cardinal directions suggests an apparent intent of an ancient urban planner to interweave, by means of geometry, the microcosm and the macrocosm. This theme of the pre-planned cosmic capital was clearly evident and extensively articulated throughout Chinese history.

This week’s readings focus on the cosmic cities of China and India, whose planning interweaved celestial alignments with the symbolic realm of their builders cosmology. Research on these is aided by recourse to the historical record which provides rich evidence on the ideology and beliefs of the inhabitants of these sacred cities.

Required Reading

You should start with Malville’s notes on cosmic and sacred cities, which introduces the topic. Particular themes are then expanded by Pankenier, Malville et al and Kak, especially with relation to Chinese and Hindu archaeoastronomy.

Cosmic and Sacred Cities Notes [DOC ON MOODLE]

Pankenier, David, “Cosmic Capitals and Numinous Precincts in Early China,” *Journal of Cosmology* 9, 2010, pp. 2030-40. Available online:
<http://journalofcosmology.com/AncientAstronomy100.html>

Malville, J. McKim and R. N. Swaminathan, “People, Planets and the Sun: Surya Puja in Tamil Nadu, South India,” *Culture and Cosmos* 2(1), 1998, pp. 3-15. [PDF ON MOODLE ONLINE LIBRARY]

Kak, Subhash, “Visions of the Cosmos: Archaeoastronomy in Ancient India,” *Journal of Cosmology* 9, 2010, pp. 2063-77. Available online:
<http://journalofcosmology.com/AncientAstronomy103.html>

Optional Reading

Campion, Nicholas, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World Religions*, New York: New York University Press, 2012, Chapters 9, 10.

Xu Zhentao, David Pankenier, and Jiang Yaotiao (eds.), *East Asian Archaeoastronomy: Historical Records of Astronomical Observations of China, Japan and Korea*. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 2000.

Pankenier, David, Zhentao Xu and Yaotiao Jiang (eds.), *Archaeoastronomy in East Asia: Historical Observational Records of Comets and Meteor Showers from China, Japan and Korea*. New York: Cambria Press, 2008.

Malville, J. McKim and L.M. Gujral (eds.), *Ancient Cities, Sacred Skies: Cosmic Geometries and City Planning in Ancient India*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International for Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1999.

Kak, Subhash, "Archaeoastronomy in India." Pre-print available online:
<http://arxiv.org/abs/1002.4513>

Thought for the Week

What is the impact of the historical record on how Archaeoastronomy is done?