

Imagining Astrology:

Painted Schemes and Threads of the Soul

Conference Programme
10-11 July 2010

Giusto de Menabuoi
The Creation of the World, c. 1378
Baptistery, Padova



16.00 - 16.30 Afternoon tea break

16.30 - 17.30 **Kocku von Stuckrad** (University of Groningen)

Jewish astrological imagery in late antiquity

Chair: Darrelyn Gunzburg

In late antiquity, astrology was the most prominent technique and symbolic language for investigating the qualitative dimension of time, interpreting the deeper structures of history, and living in harmony with the powers of the cosmos. Although many scholars assume that ancient Judaism was sceptical of or radically opposed to astrology and its visual representations, this is a simplification of the evidence found in ancient sources, in both material culture and religious imagination. A significant number of iconographic depictions of the planetary world, also found in large bodies of Jewish literature, reveal the iconographic importance of astrological thinking in ancient Judaism.

17.30 - 18.00 Discussion and summary

18.00 - 19.00 Wine reception

Sunday, 11 July 2010

9.00 - 9.45 Registration for Sunday-only participants

9.45 - 10.00 Brief welcome

10.00 - 11.00 **Elliot R. Wolfson** (New York University)

Theosis, vision, and the astral body in medieval German Pietism and the Spanish Kabbalah

Chair: Liz Greene

This paper will explore the notion of the astral body in the works of the Rhineland Jewish Pietists and the Spanish Kabbalists of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. Specifically, it will focus on contemplative practices in the two streams of medieval Jewish esotericism that involved ascetic renunciation of the body as a means to cultivate a vision of the celestial image, culminating in the angelification and divinisation of the human.

11.00 - 11.15 Morning tea break

11.15 - 12.15 **Darrelyn Gunzburg** (University of Bristol)

The language of Giotto's sky: medieval frescoes as astrological documents

Chair: Patrick Curry

In c. 1309, Giotto di Bondone was commissioned to paint a three-tiered fresco scheme in the first floor Salone of the local Town Hall, the Palazzo della Ragione, Padova, Italy. The scheme is filled with astronomical and astrological imagery said to be influenced by Pietro d'Abano, who was teaching medicine, philosophy, and astrology at Padova University at the time. Its original meaning, contained within a careful arrangement of sky images and symbols, has continued to puzzle art historians, modern iconographers, and scholars alike. While one can never truly stand in the shoes of those who lived in medieval times, approaching the scheme with the techniques of medieval astrology and visual astronomy can provide fresh insights into the message of this medieval document.

12.15 - 13.45 Lunch

13.45 - 14.45 **Geoffrey Shamos** (University of Pennsylvania)

Astrology as sociology: depictions of the 'Children of the Planets', 1400-1600

Chair: Darrelyn Gunzburg

The early medieval belief that the planets – Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Sun, and Moon – determined the temperament, complexion, profession, and even the manner of death of individuals, was depicted by late medieval and early modern artists in a series of images known as the 'Children of the Planets'. By merging scientific knowledge and popular imagery, the series helped to shape the understanding of the cosmos, and also provided a means of defining social relations. The imagery of the 'Children of the Planets' links diverse individuals according to mutual planetary affiliations, offering a system for categorizing corporate identity and providing an important sociological function to astrology in the late medieval and early modern period.

14.45 - 15.00 Break

15.00 - 16.00 **Peter J. Forshaw** (University of Amsterdam)

Astrologers and chimiologers: Paracelsian reflections on the stars and the Stone

Chair: Nicholas Campion

The Hermetic notion of a relationship between the heavens above and the earth below received its most authoritative statement in that ur-text of the alchemists, the *Tabula Smaragdina* or *Emerald Tablet*, a work that became accessible to Western readers with its translation into Latin during the twelfth-century Renaissance. This paper will discuss the relationship between astrology and alchemy in early modern Europe, with a particular focus on the writings of the celebrated medical reformer and occult philosopher Theophrastus Paracelsus of Hohenheim (1493-1541), significant followers such as Oswald Croll and Gerard Dorn, and the critical response of opponents like the alchemist Andreas Libavius to the Paracelsian conjunction of *astrologia* and *spagiria*.

16.00 - 16.30 Afternoon tea break

16.30 - 17.30 **Liz Greene** (University of Bristol)

The magical astrology of the British occult revival, 1885-1939

Chair: Nicholas Campion

Astrology enjoyed a resurgence in the British occult revival of the *fin-de-siècle*. The public face of this 'new' astrology relied on traditional Ptolemaic horoscope interpretations and was used for characterological as well as divinatory purposes. But at the same time, another astrology was being cultivated within Victorian and Edwardian magical groups, concerned with self-transformation and spiritual development through the adjuration of planetary and angelic powers. This magical astrology, or astral magic, became fused during the inter-war years with the new psychologies of Freud and Jung. Virtually ignored by historians of astrology, it has nevertheless exercised a major influence on contemporary astrologies, psychologies, and spiritualities.

17.30 - 18.00 Discussion and summary

18.00 Close

Speakers and chairs

Roger Beck is Professor Emeritus at the University of Toronto, where he began his career at Erindale College and Department of Classics (Lecturer 1964-65, Assistant Professor 1968-74, Associate Professor 1974-84, Professor 1984-98, Professor Emeritus since 1998). He received his BA from Oxford (1961) and his PhD in Classical Philology at University of Illinois (1971). He was Secretary of the Classical Association of Canada from 1977-79, and Review Editor (1978-82) and Associate Editor (1982-86) for the journal *Phoenix*. His current research interests are Mithraism and religion in the Roman Empire; ancient astrology and astronomy; and Petronius and the ancient novel. His works include *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire* (2006) and *A Brief History of Astrology* (2006).

Bernadette Brady is a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology, Archaeology and History, University of Wales, Lampeter, with completion expected in 2011. She received an MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology from Bath Spa University (2005). She is a tutor on the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology at University of Wales, Lampeter, and on the MSc in Holistic Science at Schumacher College, University of Plymouth. Academic publications include 'Chartres Cathedral and the Role of the Sun in the Cathedral's Christian Platonist Theology', in N. Campion and P. Curry (eds.), *Sky and Psyche: The Relationship Between Cosmos and Consciousness* (2006); 'Four Galilean Horoscopes: An Analysis of Galileo's Astrological Techniques', in N. Kollerstrom and N. Campion (eds.), *Galileo's Astrology* (2003).

Nicholas Campion is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology, Anthropology and History, University of Wales, Lampeter, and Director of the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology at University of Wales, Lampeter. He is editor of *Culture and Cosmos: A Journal of the History of Astrology and Cultural Astronomy*. His publications include *The Dawn of Astrology: A Cultural History of Astrology, Vol. 1* (2008) and *The Golden Age of Astrology: A Cultural History of Astrology, Vol. 2* (2009).

Patrick Curry is an honorary lecturer at the University of Wales, Lampeter, and the author of several books on the history and philosophy of astrology, among other subjects. His work includes *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (1989), *A Confusion of Prophets: Victorian and Edwardian Astrology* (1992), and (with Roy Willis) *Astrology, Science, and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon* (2004).

Peter J. Forshaw is Assistant Professor for History of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam's Center for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents. He was a British Academy Post-Doctoral Fellow at Birkbeck College, University of London, where he received his PhD. He is co-convenor of the 'Early Modern Philosophy and the Scientific Imagination' seminars, held monthly since 2003 in the Institute of English Studies, London, and is the editor of the journal *Aries*. Publications include chapters on alchemy, magic, and Kabbalah in various edited collections. His monograph, *The Mage's Images: Occult Theosophy in Heinrich Khunrath's Early Modern Oratory and Laboratory*, is due to be published later in 2010, along with his translation of Khunrath's *The Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*.

Liz Greene received her PhD from the Department of Historical Studies, University of Bristol, in 2010. She also holds an MA and PhD in Psychology from Los Angeles University (1971) and an MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology from Bath Spa University (2007). She is a qualified analytical psychologist (Association of Jungian Analysts, London, 1983) and a member of the International Association of Analytical Psychology. She is a tutor on the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology, University of Wales, Lampeter. Academic publications include 'Did Orphic Beliefs Influence the Development of Hellenistic Astrology?', *Culture and Cosmos* (2005); and 'Love, Alchemy, and Planetary Attractions', in Angela Voss and Jean Hinson Lall (eds.), *The Imaginal Cosmos: Astrology, Divination and the Sacred* (2007).

Conference Programme

Saturday, 10 July 2010

10.15-11.00 Registration and coffee

11.00 - 11.15 Welcome

11.15 - 12.15 **Bernadette Brady** (University of Wales, Lampeter)

Images in the heavens: a cultural landscape

Chair: Darrelyn Gunzburg

This paper considers the unique culture of heavenly images in both their persistence and their flexibility. From the earliest Elamite seals of the 4th millennium BCE to the list-maps in the 1st century CE to Ptolemy's *Almagest*, the constellation images were established in Eastern and Western minds. With the invention of printing and the age of the great star atlases from the 16th to 19th centuries, the images resisted attempts by cartographers to Gothicise, Christianise, politicise, or simply remove them. This paper argues that the constellation images are a living gallery of human life, ranging from the Paleolithic to the modern world. With their acceptance across a diversity of people and nations, the constellation images today represent a culture of humanity rather than one of tribes, clans, nations, languages, or religions.

12.15 - 13.45 Lunch

13.45 - 14.45 **Ronald Hutton** (University of Bristol)

The strange history of archaeoastronomy

Chair: Liz Greene

Between 1965 and 1985, British archaeologists found themselves obliged to study the skies as well as the evidence beneath the earth. The sciences of astronomy, mathematics, and statistics bore down on the study of prehistoric monuments as never before, and a series of impressive books and conferences explored the alignments and proportions of ancient ceremonial sites. A quarter of a century later, all this excitement has evaporated. The four different disciplines have separated again, and prehistory has been handed back to the excavators. This paper questions why things should have fallen out in this way. Were solid gains in knowledge made during the period in which archaeoastronomy was fashionable? Or was it all just moonshine?

14.45 - 15.00 Break

15.00 - 16.00 **Roger Beck** (University of Toronto)

Imagery and narrative in an ancient horoscope: P. Lond. 130 (Greek Horoscopes No. 81)

Chair: Liz Greene

'Star-talk' may be understood as a symbolic idiom, a form of jargon invented and spoken/written by astrologers. But to many of the ancients – the evidence for this is overwhelming – star-talk was a celestial language spoken by the stars themselves in their motions. The language signs were themselves conscious language users. The dual nature of star-talk as a language spoken by both stars and humans raises questions of semiology and semantics, of grammar and of narratology. This paper addresses some of these questions in the context of an unusual Greek papyrus horoscope from the first century CE, in which highly elaborate descriptions of planetary journeyings have replaced the usual matter-of-fact listing of longitudes.

Imagining Astrology: Painted Schemes and Threads of the Soul

Astrology as a way of understanding the world has woven its thread into cultures since Mesopotamian times. Along with its technical descriptions of calculation and interpretation, whether written on clay tablets or vellum, using stylus, quill, or printing press, it has also taken form in sculpture, mosaics, and painting, as well as inhabiting through visual imagery esoteric bodies of knowledge such as Kabbalah, alchemy, and magic. Modern scholarship, viewing astrology from the outside, pays little attention to the language incorporated in these currents of esoteric lore and has assigned astrology a solely divinatory function shaped by Aristotelian cosmology and Neoplatonic philosophy. In so doing, the Academy has failed to understand that astrology forms a lingua franca stitching together multiple paradigms of thinking. These fall beyond cultures and bind, underpin, and flow through them, reflective of and inherently part of human experience and the human religious imagination.

This conference has been organised by Darrelyn Gunzburg and Liz Greene, and is sponsored by the Bristol Institute for Research in the Humanities (BIRTHA), the University of Bristol Alumni Fund, and the University of Bristol Centre for Medieval Studies. We would like to thank the following people for their help and support:

Dr. Beth Williamson, Senior Lecturer in History of Art, Department of Historical Studies
Professor Ronald Hutton, Professor of History, Department of Historical Studies
Professor Ad Putter, Professor of Medieval English Literature, Department of English
Dr. James Clark, Head of School, Graduate School of Arts and Humanities
Samantha Barlow, BIRTHA Administrator, Graduate School of Arts and Humanities
Chris Mitchell
Frances Clynes

Darrelyn Gunzburg is a PhD candidate in the Department of History of Art at the University of Bristol, with expected completion in 2014. She received her BA from The Open University in 2007, and also holds a Diploma in Directing from the National Institute of Dramatic Art, University of South Wales, Sydney, Australia (1986). She was editor of *Lowdown: Youth Performing Arts Magazine* (1993) and of *Dialogue: Newsletter of the Australian National Playwrights' Centre* (1989-91), and since 2008 has been a regular contributor to *The Art Book* (Wiley-Blackwell). She is currently a tutor on the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology at the University of Wales, Lampeter. Academic publications include 'Looking Back: The transgression of social codes explored through the direct gaze in Fra Angelico's San Marco Altarpiece (c. 1438-40)' for *St Andrews Journal of Art History and Museum Studies* (2010).

Ronald Hutton is Professor of History at the University of Bristol (August 1996 to date). Prior to this he was a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, before serving as Lecturer and then Reader in History at Bristol (1981-96). In 2009 he was appointed Historical Commissioner of English Heritage, becoming part of the team of commissioners who supervise English Heritage's activities and make policy for it. Since the 1980s he has been involved in the writing and presentation of documentaries for London Weekend Television. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and the Society of Antiquaries. His many published works include *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles* (1993); *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (1996); *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (1999); and *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (2009).

Geoffrey Shamos is a PhD candidate in the Department of the History of Art, University of Pennsylvania, with expected completion in 2012. He received his BA in Literature (with distinction) from Yale University in 2002. From 2006-2008 he was Teaching Assistant in Art History at the University of Pennsylvania, and in 2007 he was Writing Instructor at the same university. His area of research is the art of the Renaissance in northern Europe. Academic publications include 'Review of Ilja M. Veldman, Images for the Eye and Soul: Function and Meaning in Netherlandish Prints (1450-1650)' for *The Historians of Netherlandish Art Review of Books* (April 2009).

Kocku von Stuckrad is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Groningen. From 2003 to 2009 he was Assistant Professor at the University of Amsterdam, Chair for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents. He received his PhD from the University of Bremen in 1999. His focus of interest is the European history of religion and esoteric discourses in Western culture, with special emphasis on astrology and Kabbalah. He has organised a number of academic conferences, including *Religious Pluralism in Europe* (University of Erfurt, 2000) and *Kabbalah and Modernity* (University of Amsterdam, 2007). His many publications include *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (2005) and two recently published works, *History of Western Astrology* (2010) and *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (2010).

Elliot R. Wolfson is Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University. He received his PhD in Jewish mysticism and philosophy in 1986 from Brandeis University. His areas of research include Jewish mysticism and philosophy, gender construction and the history of religion, symbolism and myth, philosophical hermeneutics, and the phenomenology of religious experience. His affiliations include the American Academy of Religion, the World Congress of Jewish Studies, and the Association for Jewish Studies. His many publications include *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (1994), which won the American Academy of Religion Award for Excellence in Historical Studies and the National Jewish Book Award for Excellence in Scholarship, and *Luminal Darkness: Imaginal Gleanings from Zoharic Literature* (2007).