

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

Week 2: Method and Theory

Purpose of the week

This week focuses on the methodologies and paradigms that have been used to interpret the archaeological record. Archaeoastronomy, like Archaeology, is interested in understanding cultures based on the material culture they leave behind. The nature of the primary sources – the archaeological record – has deep implications on their interpretation. In the absence of other sources, care must be taken not to over-interpret the data, and this has been a big problem in the field, especially when dealing with prehistory.

Tasks this week

- Familiarise yourself with the key Archaeoastronomy journals
- Read the two pieces to review for your first assignment.

Class Description

The focus of this week's readings is on how one should approach the study of material culture. The primary sources of an archaeoastronomer are the material remains left by a given culture, be it a megalithic tomb, a pyramid, a medieval church or a prehistoric piece of bone carved with celestial symbols. Most often than not, these were identified in a survey, retrieved or even restored during archaeological excavation work. The latter, by its very nature, is destructive: archaeological fieldwork has been compared to a historian reading a book and tearing up and destroying the pages as he goes. Archaeological methodology, and by extension that of Archaeoastronomy, is thus unique among the social disciplines and a balance needs to be struck not to over-interpret the data.

Throughout the history of archaeology various have been the approaches to the interpretation of material remains and the creation of theories. Your readings this week will cover the several paradigms (or 'Theories', with capital T) in Archaeology and Archaeoastronomy: from the diffusionism and evolutionist views of Victorian antiquarians, through the 'green' and 'brown' split in Archaeoastronomy, to the more recent Interpretative Archaeologies.

This week you should also explore the main academic publications of the field. These are key resources that are not available on JSTOR. However, Journal for the History of Astronomy articles up to 2010 are freely available online in the Astrophysics Data Service, a repository similar to JSTOR.

Required Reading

How archaeologists and archaeoastronomers have interpreted the past and the main historical and current paradigms that have influenced them will occupy you this week. This parallels similar developments in Anthropology, which you'll have read about in the Research Methods module. A solid research methodology is as important in this module as it was then, so feel free to go back and reread some of the material for that module.

Renfrew, Colin and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* (6th ed), London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2012, Chapter 1 (pp. 21-48). [PDF ON MOODLE]

Hodder, Ian and Scott Hutson, *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology* (3rd ed), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, Conclusion (pp. 236-47). [E-BOOK ON TSD LIBRARY]

Ruggles, Clive and Nicholas Saunders, "The Study of Cultural Astronomy". In Aveni, Anthony (ed), *Foundations of New World Cultural Astronomy*, Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2008, Chapter 32 (pp.725-50). Originally published in Ruggles, C and N Saunders (eds), *Astronomies and Cultures*, Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993.

Ruggles, Clive, "Pushing back the frontiers or still running around the same circles? 'Interpretative archaeoastronomy' thirty years on," *Proceedings IAU Symposium No. 278*, 2011, pp 1-18. [DOC ON MOODLE]

Malville, Kim, *Seven (Deadly) Sins of Archaeoastronomy Notes* [DOC ON MOODLE]

Optional Reading

Renfrew, Colin and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* (6th ed), London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2012.

Renfrew, Colin and Paul Bahn (eds), *Archaeology: The Key Concepts*, London: Routledge, 2005.

Hodder, Ian and Scott Hutson, *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology* (3rd ed), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Bell, James, *Reconstructing Prehistory – Scientific Method in Archaeology*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

Iwaniszewski, Stanislaw, "The Sky as a Social Field." In C Ruggles (ed), *Proceedings IAU Symposium No. 278*, 2011, pp. 30-37.

Recommended resources

Journal for the History of Astronomy

<http://www.shpltd.co.uk/jha.html>

Archaeoastronomy – The Journal of Astronomy in Culture

<http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/journals/jarch.html>

Archaeoastronomy & Ethnoastronomy News Archive

<http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~tlaloc/archastro/ae.html>

ADS – Astrophysics Data System

<http://adswww.harvard.edu/>

Thought for the Week

Is Archaeoastronomy only concerned with the ancient world?