

MA Cultural Astronomy and Astrology

History of Astrology

Week 7

Weekly Description: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Nick Campion

Purpose of the Week

To gain a critical awareness of western astrology in the 18th and 19th centuries, with particular attention to questions of 'decline' and 'revival'.

Tasks This Week

Consider your essay topics.

Post your choice of topics for Essay 1 on the Forum if you have made it.

Attend or listen to the webex seminar.

Weekly Description

This week covers the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the period when judicial astrology almost disappeared and then revived, and natural astrology began its conversion into astrophysics, under cover of Newtonian philosophy. Astrology (I argue) survived in two forms - as Patrick Curry's 'low astrology' in the almanacs, and as 'esotericism' or as a factor in 'magical' (notice my insertion of quotation marks around 'esotericism' and 'magical' to indicate that I do not wish to project any modern assumptions onto eighteenth century) ritual embedded in parts of Freemasonry and later to emerge in late nineteenth century magic groups such as the Golden Dawn. I also argue in *A History of Western Astrology* Vol. 2, that certain underlying astrological principles (the notion of an ordered cosmos, the belief that human life and terrestrial patterns are connected) was embedded in secular world-systems such as sociology in the nineteenth century (we might make the same point about the influence of Kabbalah in Freud and of astrology, via Jung, on Myers-Briggs personality testing). This I call 'disguised' astrology.

To summarise, then, I suggest that 18th century astrology saw the following trends and characteristics:

1. The near disappearance of horoscopic astrology
2. The attempt to rationalise astrology according to Newtonian principles (The claims of Newtonianism, as an 'ism', are not necessarily the same as those of Isaac Newton).
3. The loss of intellectual respectability
4. The diversion of esoteric astrology into esoteric and occult currents within Freemasonry.
5. The continuation of 'low' astrology in mass, popular culture.

This said, the detailed scholarly research into 18th century European astrology has yet to be done.

The early nineteenth-century saw the first serious revival of judicial astrology in Britain since its decline in the late seventeenth-century. Factors to consider may include the new independence of the self-educated British middle classes from the hegemony of an intellectual elite, and Romanticism as a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism. We might also ask whether the revival of judicial astrology was a reaction against Enlightenment secularism, or part of it, or both. The answer is probably that, as astrology developed, it encompassed different world-views and perspectives, which may be variously described as Romantic or Secular. By the end of the 19th century, the Theosophical Society had become an organising force in institutional astrology, as well as the theory and practice. There is a widely accepted theory, in the rest of Europe as well as in Britain, that Britain was the pioneer in the revival of judicial astrology in the 19th century. However, this theory fails to take developments in France and Germany into account. A number of key features and characteristics of 19th century European astrology can be identified.

1. A growing interest in judicial astrology, initially amongst a small group of enthusiasts, spreading to the general public, at least in Britain, by the end of the century
2. A consistent attempt, especially in Britain, to organise astrological societies and periodicals, which was only successful by the end of the century.
3. Diverse currents, some requiring empirical proof, others more aligned with the occult and magical.

We should note that (1) astrology in the USA is included in the overall sphere of European astrology (I am trying not to use the word 'Western') and was connected to Britain via its common language and (2) the word 'science' only moved towards its current meaning during the course of the century, and that there was no necessary contradiction between being 'magical' and 'scientific'.

A word about the distinction between Revival and Reform. I use the term revival in the context of the assumption that astrology had wholly or partially disappeared and therefore revived (as in the 'occult' revival). The notion of reform applies to those attempts to purge astrology of features which were thought not to work or be true, and replace them with features which did work, were true, and /or were effective.

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The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: Required Reading

Nick Campion

Required Reading: Primary Sources

This week's primary sources are theoretical rather than technical, and feature Ebenezer Sibly's magical esotericism and Franz Mesmer's naturalism.

Sibly, Ebenezer, *A New and Complete Illustration of the Celestial Science of Astrology*, 2 Vols., London 1787. Book 4.

<http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/sibly4.htm>

We recommend reading paragraphs 1059 (the opening paragraph to 1076 (paragraph numbers are in the text in blue print). Sibly's book was the first major astrology book to be published in English in the 18th century. His astrology was derived from 17th century texts, so the interest in this section is its illustration of the magical/mystical context for astrology as the 19th c approached. Sibly was a Freemason and deeply influenced by Emmanuel Swedenborg.

Mesmer, Franz Anton, *Mesmerism: being the translation of Mesmer's historic Mémoire sur la découverte du Magnétisme Animal to appear in English*, London: Macdonald 1947 [1779].

PDF

One, ultimately unsuccessful, current in 18th century astrology was the attempt to reconcile astrology with a Newtonian universe of mathematical law and natural influence. This reached its most ambitious point in the work of Franz Mesmer, the founder of Mesmerism (later Hypnotism). Mesmer himself rejected the term 'astrology'. Mesmer's work was rejected by the medical establishment in France but was popular amongst esotericists, occultists and astrologers.

Mesmer Franz, 'Physical-Medical Treatise on the Influence of the Planets', in Bloch, George, *Mesmerism: a translation of the Scientific and Medical Writings of Franz Anton Mesmer*, Los Altos CA: William Kauffman 1980, pp. 1-22.

PDF (NOT CURRENTLY AVAILABLE SO USE THE 1947 VERSION)

Required Reading: Secondary Sources

Campion, Nicholas, *A History of Western Astrology*, Vol. 2 (London: Continuum 2009), chapters 12-16.

Perkins, Maureen, *Visions of the Future: Almanacs, Time, and Cultural Change*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, chapter 4, 'Almanacs and Prophecy'
OXFORD SCHOLARSHIP ON LINE.

Oestmann, Günther, 'J.W.A Pfaff and the Rediscovery of Astrology in the Age of Romanticism', in Oestmann, Günther, H. K. von Stuckrad, G. Oestmann and D. Rutkin (eds.), *Horoscopes and Public Spheres*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2005, pp. 240-57.

GOOGLE BOOKS

Owen, Alex, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, chapter 1.
GOOGLE BOOKS

Paul Cheshire, 'William Gilbert: Macrocosmal Astrologer in an Age of Revolution', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 15, no. 2, Autumn/Winter 2011, pp. 55–63.
PDF ON MOODLE

Clifford J. Cunningham and Günther Oestmann, 'Classical Deities in Astronomy: The Employment of Verse to Commemorate the Discovery of the Planets Uranus, Ceres, Pallas, Juno, and Vesta', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 17, no. 1, (Spring/Summer 2013): pp. 3–29.
http://www.cultureandcosmos.org/pdfs/17-1/17-1_cunningham.pdf

Joscelyn Godwin, 'Astral Ascent in the Occult Revival', *Celestial Magic*, special issue of *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 19, nos. 1 and 2, Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer 2015, pp. 189-206.
<http://www.cultureandcosmos.org/abstracts/19-Godwin.php>

Required Reading: Historiography

Evans, Richard, *In Defence of History*, London: Granta Books 1997, chapter 7.

Thomas, Keith, 'An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, II', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 6 no 1 (Summer 1975) pp. 91-109.
JSTOR

Curry, Patrick 'Astrology on Trial, and its Historians: Reflections on the Historiography of 'Superstition'', *Culture and Cosmos*, Autumn/Winter 2000, Vol. 4 no 2, pp. 47-56
http://www.cultureandcosmos.org/pdfs/4-1/4-1_Curry_Historical_Approaches.pdf

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The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: Optional Reading Online

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Optional Reading: Primary Sources

There are few primary sources this week, due to a lack of material online. We suggest that you take a look at the works of Eliphas Levi at <http://www.occult-underground.com/levi.html>

Levi has a claim to be the most influential exponent of astrological magic in the 19th century, and combined astrology with the tarot, kabbalah and magic..

Raphael, *A Manual of Astrology* (London, Thomas Tegg and Son, 1828).

<https://archive.org/details/amanualastrolog00smitgoog/page/n10>

A classic work of early 19th century astrology.

Optional Reading: Secondary Sources

Holden, James Herschel, *A History of Horoscopic Astrology*, Tempe AZ:

American Federation of Astrologers, 1996, pp. 198-194.

GOOGLE BOOKS

Brats, James D., Reviewed work(s): *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance* by Arthur Versluis, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 108, No. 3 (Jun., 2003), pp. 833-834.

JSTOR

Butler, Jon, 'Magic, Astrology and the Early American Heritage 1600-1760', *American Historical Review*, 1979, Vol 84, pp 317-46.

JSTOR

Davies, Owen, 'Healing Charms in Use in England and Wales 1700-1950', *Folklore*, Vol. 107, (1996), pp. 19-32.

JSTOR

Davies, Owen, 'Charmers and Charming in England and Wales from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century', *Folklore*, Vol. 109, (1998), pp. 41-52.

JSTOR

Davies, Owen, 'Newspapers and the Popular Belief in Witchcraft and Magic in the Modern Period', *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 37, no 2 (April 1998), pp. 139-165.

JSTOR

(Also by Davies: Davies, Owen, 'Witchcraft: The Spell That Didn't Break', *History Today*, August 1999, (page numbers not known))

Eliade, Mircea, Review: *Occultism and Freemasonry in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, *History of Religions*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Aug., 1973), pp. 89-91.

JSTOR

Farnell, Kim, 'A Brief Biography of Alan Leo',

http://www.skyscript.co.uk/Alan_Leo.html

Farnell, Kim, 'Seven Faces of Raphael'

<http://www.skyscript.co.uk/raphael.html>

Farnell, Kim, 'That Terrible Iconoclast: A Brief Biography of Sepharial',

<http://www.skyscript.co.uk/sepharial.html>

Jacob, Margaret C., 'Newtonianism and the Origins of the Enlightenment: A Reassessment', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Autumn 1977), pp. 1-25
JSTOR

Harrison, Mark, 'From Medical Astrology to Medical Astronomy: Sol-Lunar and Planetary Theories of Disease in British Medicine, c. 1700-1850', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Mar., 2000), pp. 25-48
JSTOR

Owen, Alex, "'Borderland Forms'": Arthur Conan Doyle, Albion's Daughters, and the Politics of the Cottingley Fairies, *History Workshop*, No. 38 (1994), pp. 48-85.
JSTOR

Pang, Alex Soojung-Kim, 'The Social Event of the Season: Solar Eclipse Expeditions and Victorian Culture', *Isis*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (Jun., 1993), pp. 252-277.
JSTOR

Portolano, Marlana, 'John Quincy Adams's Rhetorical Crusade for Astronomy', *Isis*, Vol. 91, No. 3 (Sep., 2000), pp. 480-503.
JSTOR

Tingay, Kevin, 'Madame Blavatsky's Children: Theosophy and Its Heirs', in Bowman, Marion and Sutcliffe, Steven, *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2000, pp. 37-50.
PDF

Optional Reading Print

Gansten, Martin, 'Placidian Teachings in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain: John Worsdale and Thomas Oxley', in Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene (eds), *Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity*, Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2010, pp. 109-124.

Curry, Patrick, *A Confusion of Prophets: Victorian and Edwardian Astrology*, (London: Collins & Brown, 1992).

Davies, Owen, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736-1951*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.
See reviews on JSTOR

Farnell, Kim, *The Astral Tramp: A Biography of Sepharial* (Nottingham: Ascella, 1998).

Gibbons, G.J. *Spirituality and the Occult from the Renaissance to the Modern Age*, London: Routledge 2001.

Godwin, Joscelyn, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Howe, Ellic, *Urania's Children* (London: William Kimber, 1967), chapters 1-6.

Jacob, Margaret C., *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981.

Perkins, Maureen, *The Reform of Time: Magic and Modernity*, London: Pluto Press, 2001.

Faivre, Antoine and Needleman, Jacob, *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, London: SCM Press, 1992.
See Reviews on JSTOR

Katz, David, *The Occult Tradition from the Renaissance to the Present Day*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2005.

Versluis, Arthur, *Wisdom's Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition*, New York: State University of New York Press 1999.