

MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
Introduction to Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
Week 4: Cosmology and Culture
Weekly Introduction
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Purpose of the week

The MA is taught within the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture. But what exactly is cosmology? This week is designed to focus your thoughts on what we mean by cosmology, what the cosmos is, and how people relate to it.

Tasks this week

- Do the required reading, check some of the recommended reading.
- Continue your observations for your sky journal
- Pace yourself and don't take on too much.

Preparation for next week

- Read Nick's powerpoint on cultural astronomy
- Read the discussion paper by Clive Ruggles
- Read Bernadette's powerpoint on skylscapes
- Read Darrelyn's powerpoint on astronomical ceilings

Class Description

Although astrology and astronomy are regarded as entirely distinct disciplines in the modern world, they share common origins. This week's course work focuses on some developments in modern cosmology and their cultural significance. This class will investigate relevant issues in contemporary astronomy and cosmology, and will consider their relationship with astrology: in what ways do astrologers appropriate the latest astronomical discoveries or cosmological theories? While modern astronomy is normally presented as hostile to astrology, how is it used to reinforce astrology? This is a question of significance for modern debates on the 'politics of knowledge'.

We also need to remember competing definitions of cosmology:

1. Traditional:
 - a. the study of the way in which people align themselves with the cosmos
 - b. the study of traditional theories about the cosmos
2. Modern: the scientific study of the cosmos.

In the traditional sense we should look at the Greek meaning of *kosmos* which is translated as 'beautiful order' or 'adornment' and is the root of the word cosmetic. For Plato (who did so much to craft the Greek theory of the *kosmos*) articulating the standard world view of pre-modern and non-western peoples, the *kosmos* was alive.

The Latin Universe, by contrast, contains everything but has no connotations of meaning, beauty or order.

The implication of *kosmos* is that, we are inside and part of the *kosmos* so the notion of studying it objectively is impossible. In studying the *kosmos* we study ourselves.

Questions to think about this week include;

- Is there anything in modern cosmological models which provides either (a) meaning for humanity or (b) a conceptual rationale for astrology?
- Are cosmologies culturally constructed?
- How do cosmologies shape culture?