

Heavenly Bodies over Asia

March 3 – 5 – Yale University

Presentation Abstracts

The Beginnings of Perso-Arabic Astrology in India: From Sahl ibn Bishr to Samarasimha

Martin Gansten, Lund University

In several papers published between 2014 and 2019 – building on and refining, but also to a certain extent correcting, the earlier work of David Pingree and, before him, Albrecht Weber – an argument was developed to the effect that a text seminal to the tradition of Sanskritized Perso-Arabic astrology (Tājika) but unknown to both these scholars had been authored by Samarasimha in the thirteenth century and had still been extant by the seventeenth, but was now apparently lost except for some fragments. On the basis of such fragments and of allusions found in later Sanskrit authors, conjectures were made concerning the structure, content, form and sources of this lost work. In early 2022, these conjectures were substantiated by the find of one previously unknown manuscript dated 1807, containing the first and last parts of the supposedly lost work, and the subsequent correct identification of another manuscript dated 1751, previously catalogued and digitized but misattributed, containing its middle part. This talk will explore what the recovery of the foundational work on Tājika can tell us about its author and about the earliest history of the tradition.

Moving Spirits: The Heavens in the Body and Mind-Body Dualism

Lisa Raphals, University of California, Riverside

There are many representation of the heavens in the body in Chinese religion and philosophy, including philosophical macrocosm-microcosm analogies and correlations between somatic sites and Daoist gods. This paper addresses a different kind of representation of the skies within: astral calendars that govern movements of the “human spirit” (*renshen* 人神) within the body, their implications for medicine, and their implications for contemporary debates on mind-body dualism in Chinese and Western contexts.

Further Considerations on the Cords of Wind within the Indian and Iranian Cosmological Systems, and their Origins

Antonio Panaino, University of Bologna

The *Sūryasiddhānta* II,1-5, contains a doctrine explaining the motion of the planets due to the movements of “cords of wind” (*vātaraśmi-*, although some other names are attested in the astral literature as well), but this cosmological model was expanded within the Purāṇic literature, where stars and planets are bound to Dhruva at the center of the sky. It is presumable that the present doctrine was transferred to the Iranian world, where it was adapted to the Mazdean doctrine of the fight between stars and planets, in which the planetary bodies were imagined as bound to the chariots of the luminaries. Within the Manichaean and Mandaic cosmologies these celestial bindings were even assumed to play a larger role in pervading heaven and earth and linking also human souls to the negative celestial powers. Despite some

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seminal suggestions by Asko Parpola about the possible pre-Aryan background of the doctrine of the *vātaraśmi-*, a recent attempt to suggest a genuine Iranian and Manichaean derivation of this tradition has challenged the traditional point of view. This contribution will try to frame the matter and to show the Indian background of this very intriguing astronomical model.

Key-words: Cords of wind; cosmological models; astral demonology; Pre-Indian cultures; Vedas, Sanskrit Literature, Zoroastrianism, Manicheism; North Pole; Pole Star.

Writing her fate: two women’s astrological manuals from Roman Egypt

Lingxin Zhang, Yale University

This talk is based on my research of two Women’s Astrological Manuals from Roman Egypt, PSI inv. D 35 + P. Carlsberg 684 and P. Carlsberg 100 + PSI inv. 2183v. + PSI inv. D 152. The two manuscripts are paleographically dated to 2nd century CE and form part of the “Tebtunis Temple Library.” The “Tebtunis Temple Library” refers to a large collection of papyri written in hieroglyphs, hieratic, Demotic, and Greek, discovered in two subterranean cellars at the Temple of Soknebtunis at Umm el-Baragat (Tehtunis). Subjects covered by these papyri include narratives, religious treatises, scientific materials, etc. The two Women’s Astrological Manuals belong to the early scientific and divinatory categories within this corpus.

As such, the two Women’s Astrological Manuals are important evidence of temple and scribal knowledge. Along with several other treatises of personal astrology from Ptolemaic and Roman Fayum (2nd century BCE-2nd century CE), they greatly contribute to our understanding of the astral sciences circulating in the ancient Mediterranean world in antiquity.

Furthermore, the two Women’s Astrological Manuals are one of the few extant examples, where the predictions are divided by gender binaries. So far, 4 similarly structured manuals written for men have been identified in the “Tehtunis Temple Library.” When viewed within this context, the Women’s Astrological Manuals expand our understanding of how “gender” is constructed within the scribal culture of Graeco-Roman Egypt.

The Evolution of Rāhu and Ketu in East Asia: Astrology, Religion, and Iconography

Jeffrey Kotyk, University of Bologna

Rāhu was originally a Vedic demon, said to devour the Sun and the Moon during eclipses, but in later centuries he was associated with the ascending node of the Moon in Indian astronomy. As systematic knowledge of the planets spread in India, Buddhists also adopted Rāhu atop the seven visible planets. This set was originally eight *graha* (planets), a fact reflected in some Buddhist texts and archaeological evidence, but eventually Ketu was added, after which time the *navagraha* (nine planets) were established. Ketu originally referred to comets, but it was later assigned the astronomical function of the descending node of the Moon. These Indic developments are reflected in East Asian astronomy, literature, and even art. This study will discuss the complex reception and adaptation of this pair in Chinese and Japanese contexts, demonstrating that they historically possessed diverse identities and functions in East Asia as a result of both scientific and religious (Buddhist and Daoist) influences. I will argue that Rāhu and Ketu represent a unique example of an astronomical concept that spread across multiple spheres of scientific

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and spiritual knowledges in East Asia, a point that highlights the need to appreciate astral topics when studying premodern East Asian cultures.

Sasanian astrology: a diverse doctrinal corpus

Enrico Raffaelli, University of Toronto

This presentation studies the doctrinal corpus of Sasanian astrology. It analyzes the background of this corpus, and studies the sources for its study. It focuses on the Zoroastrian texts in Pahlavi language, our main source for the study of Sasanian astrology. One of the Pahlavi sources it analyzes is the religious encyclopedia *Dēnkard*, which contains some understudied passages highlighting the cosmogonic function of the zodiac. The presentation also studies the non-Iranian sources on Sasanian astrology. It analyzes the evidence that some Arabic astrological works originate from Pahlavi texts, taking into account some recent studies that have discussed this evidence. The presentation highlights that Sasanian astrology comprised a set of doctrines that were diverse in terms of origin, as they derived from different cultural areas (such as Mesopotamia, the Hellenistic world, and the Indian world), and in terms of focus, as they concerned subjects as different as the fate of the individuals, the fate of humanity, and political matters. The presentation furthermore examines the commonalities between astrological and apocalyptic doctrines observed in Iranian and non-Iranian texts with Sasanian background. Finally, the presentation investigates the impact of Sasanian astrology on the astrological doctrinal corpora of different cultures after the end of the Sasanian empire.

"Zodiac, decans, nakshatras– transmission of astral imagery on the medieval Northern Silk Road"

Lilla Russell-Smith, Asian Art Museum, Berlin, Germany

Abstract: Focussing on the example of a fragmented scroll in the collection of the Asian Art Museum in Berlin (Inv. Nr. III 520), and on a now almost completely destroyed ceiling decoration near Sengim (both in the Turfan Region, today in Xinjiang), the presentation will ask questions hitherto not answered by previous scholarship. The scarcity of the material, and the very fragmented state of preservation of written and illustrated manuscripts, portable paintings and wall paintings from the Turfan area makes systematic comparative research, as for example in the case of Dunhuang, almost impossible. The further complication of an almost complete lack of securely dated material makes also comparisons with Indian, Khotanese, Kuchean, Chinese, Tibetan, Tangut, Japanese and Korean art very difficult. After summarising previous research, new results, based on working with archival materials in Berlin and elsewhere, as well as with the original art works, will be presented. Are we perhaps overlooking the special role the medieval cultures of the Turfan Region may have played in the transmission in astral iconography to Japan, because of these complex circumstances?

India's Iron Cage? Astrology, Shanidev, and Devotional Religion

Carla Bellamy, Baruch College, City University of New York

Astrology in contemporary India has been professionalized, but it has also been popularized through accessible apps and YouTube channels dispensing DIY astrology advice. In this talk, I will link both of

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these trends to the liberalization of the Indian economy. Drawing on field work with Delhi-based astrologers, YouTube channels, and related publications and ephemera, I will discuss the ways in which the liberalization of the Indian economy has impacted the concept of karma in astrological discourse and the implications of this shift. I will also engage with Weber's arguments about rationalization to explore what I see as the central paradox of these discourses, namely, their attempt to fuse the highly scientific with the highly emotive. What might these changes in astrological discourse suggest about notions of selfhood vis-à-vis caste identity among India's growing middle classes?

Between Mandala and Horoscope: The Art of Tangut Astrology

Michelle McCoy, University of Pittsburgh

Encompassing divination charts, technical treatises, paintings, sculptures, and prints, the Tangut corpus contains the most extensive primary record of horoscopy, or prognostication based on a person's time of birth, from medieval China and Inner Asia. Produced between roughly the twelfth and fourteenth centuries and excavated primarily from Kharakhoto in present-day Inner Mongolia, these materials defy easy classification according to established categories: Hellenistic or Sinitic, secular or sacred, and so on. This talk addresses the unique ways that Tangut art reconciled multiple astrological traditions, focusing on the interrelation between two key forms of encoded visual knowledge: the mandala and the horoscope. Close examination of how they were made sheds new light on patterns of exchange across media, regions, and cultures. I examine how on the one hand, a new type of mandala emerged through a process of collaging separate visual repertoires and on the other, how a unique set of painted horoscopic cards conveys a comparatively mature knowledge of astrological doctrine but remains of uncertain application. Each case shows how tracking the reuse and spatial design of astral motifs can shed light on the period relationship between pictures and diagrams, divination and devotion.

A Horoscope within a Buddhist Mandala: The Met Star Mandala's Meeting of Aesthetics and Science

Elizabeth Tinsley, University of California, Irvine

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Japanese Star Mandala is both a finely painted work, and a mysterious one. The combination of Buddhism and astrology may already seem peculiar, yet texts on astronomy/astrology were available to Buddhist monks in Japan from the ninth century onward. Yet even stranger is that within this mandala is in fact embedded a horoscope. In comparison to the astral mandalas produced in Japan – and in all their great diversity – this is unique. Set against the other astral mandalas, especially those of the circular variety, the mandala presents a wonderful comparative opportunity as well as a tantalizing puzzle. It is not only notable for its size, quality, and detail, all of which suggest wealthy patronage. It also contains iconography that -- while generally conforming to conventional schemes which were requisite for the ritual activity that would have accompanied its display -- is both intriguingly idiosyncratic and often delightfully humorous. This talk presents this remarkable work that is at once a ritual tool, a depiction of divination, and a work of fine art.

From Astrology to Embryology: The Cult of the Northern Dipper in Tendai Buddhism

Bernard Faure, Columbia University

The cult of the Seven Stars of the Northern Dipper (a name that partly overlaps with Ursa Major) played an important role in China and Japan. In the form of esoteric Buddhism that developed in Japanese Tendai, in particular, Chinese astrological conceptions about "fundamental destiny" (benming) were integrated into soteriological and embryological discourses. This paper examines a few aspects of these discourses.

Fatalism as Good Policy: On the Intersection of Astral Science and Political Theory in Medieval India

Marko Geslani, University of South Carolina

This paper explores the doctrine of qualified fatalism in the *Yogayātrā*, a divinatory and horoscopic manual for warfare written by Varāhamihira, the sixth-century CE canonizer of the Sanskrit astral tradition (*Jyotiḥśāstra*). I situate his discussion of fatalism (*daivapuruṣakāra*) in the context of legal and political theories of warfare to illustrate how the astral arts of horoscopy and divination were rationalized within early Brahmanical theories of kingship, which sought to harmonize astral experts amongst the diverse specialists who comprised the royal ministry. This process not only produced horoscopic prescriptions for the application of military strategy, but also complex tensions in the corresponding notion of the king as an efficacious person.

How to 'see' the moon and extend one's life: Buddhist rituals for celestial bodies in medieval Japan.

Lucia Dolce, SOAS University of London

The sun, the moon and other celestial bodies occupied a critical position in the Buddhist system of knowledge. Their characteristics were used in analogical terms to articulate fundamental Buddhist tenets – for instance, the full moon to embody perfect enlightenment; the relation between sun and moon to visualise the dynamics of the process of enlightenment. At the same time, as physical bodies whose movement in the skies was believed to affect life on earth, stars and planets were transformed into Buddhist deities and given anthropomorphic forms. Buddhist astrologers were trained to make sense of and forecast their movements, while ritualists created procedures to extoll favourable energy from their presence in the heavens and prevent baleful effects.

In Japan, Tantric Buddhism, in particular, developed a great number of liturgies related to the stars, mostly aimed to increase fortune and ensure long life. The ritual structure of these liturgies borrowed from standard formats, such as the fire ritual or the eighteen method, but it acquired a distinctive character with the insertion of details that reproduced physical or mythological features of each celestial body. Multiple, discrete iconographies were created anew for star rituals, drawing on representations of the stars that had emerged across the Eurasian continent or

associating stars and planets to existent Tantric deities. Usually distinct along sectarian lineages, but in fact often overlapping in their visual and performative elements, these ritual iconographies unveil the rich network of connections which nurtured the worship of celestial bodies in medieval Japan.

This paper explores one example of such ritual tradition: an enigmatic method of veneration of the moon and the secret iconography it generated by connecting this heavenly body to an important deity of the Tantric pantheon, Fudō myōō (Skr. Acala). The ritual appears to have been transmitted only within the Jimon lineage of the Tendai school, which flourished at Onjōji (Miidera) and in affiliated temples of the Kyoto area –a lineage particularly relevant for documenting star ritual lore, given its monastics' concern throughout the medieval period with establishing new star deities. The starting point of my analysis is an unpublished and previously unknown source I have recently discovered in the Onjōji archives. It contains instructions on the time of the ritual and an account of what a practitioner should see on the lunar surface when the ritual is accomplished, complemented with drawings. I shall attempt to reconstruct the ritual and reconsider it in the context of life-prolonging liturgies focused on celestial bodies.