

SPICA

POSTGRADUATE JOURNAL FOR COSMOLOGY IN CULTURE

Astrological readings and divine guidance

How counsellors deal with astrological beliefs

Eton Rowing Lake: a sacred space?

Superstition and the sky

Reviewed: *Deciphering the Cosmic Number*

The Sophia Centre for
the Study of
Cosmology in Culture
at



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The cover is a composite of three images of the centre of the Milky Way: two infra red images from the Hubble and Spitzer telescopes and an X-ray image from the Chandra X-ray observatory. The image was created by NASA.
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Welcome to the first issue of Spica. This is the first postgraduate journal of its kind, covering the subject matter which it does. The journal has emerged out of the last ten years of research in the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, together with our experience in teaching the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology. The Centre – and the MA – are a part of the School of Archaeology, History and Anthropology in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. That combination reveals our academic

affiliation: historical and anthropological, with a little archaeology added, and a touch of sociology.

Our work can be summed up as the study of the many, varied and rich ways in which human beings relate to the cosmos, and use the sky as a backdrop for their lives, looking to it to provide meaning and encourage action. Astronomy and astrology in the sense they are widely understood now were not distinguished in pre-modern and non-western societies, which explains why we can bracket them together in the wider pursuit of understanding the relationship between humanity, culture and the cosmos.

Spica, being a postgraduate journal will publish the best quality MA-level work, and all contributions have to be judged at this level. However, we understand MA work often makes a valuable contribution to scholarly understanding, all the more so in an emerging field such as ours. While this first issue features work from the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology, we are aware that there are many students working in related areas in other MAs. In that case, if your work is of the highest quality, we encourage you to submit, having consulted the submission guidelines, of course.

We encourage all who are interested in our academic work to make contact.

Nick Campion

Do consumers of astrological services use astrology as a method of actively seeking divine guidance? If so, what astrological services are sought for the purpose? A Pilot Study.

by Marcia Butchart

Past academic scholarship on the question of whether astrology is a divinatory practice has been mainly theoretical. Only two studies of recent vintage, by current astrological scholars, have sought to explore whether practicing astrologers themselves experience their practice as divinatory; no studies have been discovered that explore whether recipients of astrologically derived information experience it as divinatory. This current study seeks to understand the contribution of the client's motives: whether or not astrologers perceive their function as a divinatory practice, the question is whether the clients seek astrological information as a means of divination?

Introduction: The Context of the Question

This small pilot study seeks to explore whether “consumers” of astrological advice and information use these as a means of divination: of seeking divine or non-mundane guidance. It is the hypothesis of this study that astrological clients do use astrology, in many different forms, for precisely these reasons.

What is meant by divination and might astrology justifiably be considered a divinatory practice? Michael Loewe and Carmen Blacker offer the following definition of divination: “the attempt to elicit from some higher power or supernatural being the answers to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding.”¹ Regarding astrology, Richard Tarnas argues that, “astrology...posits a systematic symbolic correspondence between planetary positions and the events of human existence.”² The possible link between astrology and divination is suggested first, by Barbara Tedlock, who observes that divination can “combine mechanical procedures with sudden bursts of intuition

¹ Michael Loewe and Carmen Blacker, “Introduction” in *Oracles and Divination*, ed. M. Loewe and C. Blacker, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), [hereafter Loewe and Blacker, *Oracles*], p. 1

² Richard Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), p.63.

or insight”³ and Alie Bird, who argues that, “Most, if not all, of the divinatory practices...employ some kind of intermediary device to facilitate the act of divination...Astrology has the horoscope.”⁴ This line of reasoning argues that astrology is, indeed, a method of divination since: (1) constructing the “intermediary device” is an astrologer’s “mechanical procedure” prior to interpretation and; (2) “sudden bursts of insight” are needed to facilitate that interpretation, argued by astrologer Robert Hand. “You look at the chart...all the components...and all of a sudden, bang! They come together...It’s an entirely intuitive process.”⁵

The horoscope to which Bird refers is most often a geocentrically-oriented diagram depicting the placements of our solar system’s planets plus the sun and moon in the signs of the zodiac (the tropical zodiac, which locates 0° Aries at the intersection of the celestial equator and earth’s orbit around the sun, is most commonly used by Western practitioners). The diagram is created for a specific point in time and place on earth. The astrologer interprets its symbolism for him/herself or a client, based on the concerns that led to its creation. The horoscope may also be called a birth chart when its point in time and space represents the birth of a person, a creature, a business, a nation, a building (to list some possibilities). Horoscopes are also created for events, such as trips, marriages, surgeries, commencement of courses of study, battles, ceremonies, earthquakes, accidents. A specialised branch of astrology, termed horary astrology, creates a horoscope for the moment a question is posed to an astrologer.⁶

A few authors within the astrological community have attempted academic research on whether astrologers themselves view or experience their art as divinatory. Garry Phillipson interviewed astrological professionals for their opinions—which were divided—on the topic, although he used the term “magic,” rather than “divination.”⁷ Nicholas Campion drew astrologers’ opinions on the topic from survey data included in his doctoral dissertation; when his two survey populations were combined, only 114 out of a total of 311 subjects (36.6%)

³ Barbara Tedlock, “Divination as a Way of Knowing: Embodiment, Visualisation, Narrative, and Interpretation”, *Folklore*, Vol. 112, No 2, (Oct 2001): [hereafter, Tedlock, *Folklore*], p. 195.

⁴ Alie Bird, “Astrology in Education: An Ethnography,” (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2006), [hereafter Bird, “Astrology”], p. 89.

⁵ Robert Hand, cited in Garry Phillipson, “What is Astrology—Science or Magic?” in *Astrology in the Year Zero*, (London: Flare Publications, 2000) [hereafter Phillipson, *Year Zero*], p. 193.

⁶ Patrick Curry, “Conversing With the Stars,” in Roy Willis and Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon*, (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p. 148.

⁷ Phillipson, *Year Zero*, pp. 182-197.

expressed belief that astrology was a form of divination.⁸ Astrology as a divinatory art was not the primary focus of Bird's doctoral dissertation, but the entirety of her Chapter Five was devoted to arguments that astrology, "patently is a divination system."⁹ [author's emphasis]. She also observed that debates on the subject remained largely theoretical;¹⁰ her observation thus underlines the relevance of a qualitative pilot study, published in 2006, by Anthony Thorley. Thorley explored the reported experiences of astrologers during the consultation itself regarding the apparent emergence of divinatory qualities, manifested particularly by altered states of consciousness and "sudden bursts of insight." His material from six in-depth interviews was broadly—although, he stresses, not conclusively—supportive of a divinatory aspect manifesting when astrologers give guidance.¹¹

But what of the experiences of those who seek guidance, rather than those who give it? This present pilot study attempts to explore the motives and mindsets of astrological "consumers." It might be argued that the astrological "consumer" is not relevant to an understanding of the presence or absence of astrology's divinatory qualities. However, a curious thread runs through significant philosophical critiques of astrology, from Cicero and Augustine through Pico della Mirandola up to the 1975 *Humanist* manifesto.¹² The authors appear to address potential astrological (or divinatory) *clients*; astrological practitioners are not addressed in the first person. Nowhere, for example, in the *Humanist's* Objections to Astrology, is there text commanding all astrological practitioners to cease and desist. Instead, the statement reads, "We, the undersigned...wish to caution the public against the unquestioning acceptance of

⁸ Nicholas Campion, "Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement: The Extent and Nature of Contemporary Belief in Astrology," (PhD diss., University of the West of England, 2004), pp. 243-244.

⁹ Bird, "Astrology," p. 86.

¹⁰ Bird, "Astrology," p. 86.

¹¹ Anthony Thorley, "Perceptions of Divination in the Astrological Consultation: A Pilot Study," *Correlation* 24(2) (2006/2007): [hereafter, Thorley, *Correlation*], p. 28.

¹² Marcus Tullius Cicero, *de Divinatione*, Book II, trans. by W.A. Falconer, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/de_Divinatione/1*.html (accessed 31 Mar 2011); Augustine, *City of God*, Book V, trans. Rev. Marcus Dod (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), <http://www.ccel.org/schaff/npnf102/iv.V.1>; Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputations Against Divinatory Astrology*, cited in Geoffrey Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology: Origins in Divination*, (Bournemouth: The Wessex Astrologer, 2003), [hereafter Cornelius, *Moment*], p. 1; "Objections to Astrology: A Statement by 186 Leading Scientists," in *Humanist*, September/October, 1975, cited in Geoffrey Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology*, (Bournemouth: The Wessex Astrologer, Ltd., 2003), pp. 22-23.

the predictions and advice given...by astrologers.”¹³ This suggests that the potential astrological-cum-divinatory clients are necessary partners in divination. I would, therefore, argue that exploring their attitudes could contribute to a fuller understanding of the subject.

This study thus seeks insight into the following aspects of the client’s experience: the types of life issues on which divinatory guidance is sought; methods employed to seek that guidance; whether astrological methods are among those used; which astrological methods are used; if seekers employ the method(s) themselves or consult practitioners; if divinatory methods chosen by astrologically involved consumers differ from those chosen by astrologically non-involved consumers.

Methodology

Following the recommendations of Alan Bryman on social research methodologies, a triangulated method of data collection was attempted.¹⁴ A semi-structured, written survey was combined semi-structured interviews with volunteers from among survey respondents. Written surveys were first distributed electronically to two target research groups. The first group consisted of 36 subjects presumed to be astrologically knowledgeable and involved, being chiefly drawn from the membership of a local astrological association. The second group of 22 subjects were suspected to have minimal, if any, astrological involvement. Members of both groups were on familiar terms with the researcher; as a consulting astrologer, I was moderately familiar with the extent of their involvement with astrology. A section of the survey was designed to gather data to confirm or disprove the researcher’s initial opinion of a subject’s involvement, thus permitting re-classification as necessary. Survey respondents’ confidentiality was safeguarded; all interviewees signed the Interview Release Form provided by the University of Wales, Trinity St. David.

The survey employed the term “transpersonal guidance” as an analogue for “divine guidance” and/or “divination.” This was done in hopes of eliciting any and all non-mundane methods respondents might employ to aid their, “movement from maelstrom to meaning.”¹⁵ It was feared that the term “divine” might convey an explicitly religious orientation. It was also feared that the term “divination” might baffle respondents who, with one exception, were American

¹³ Cornelius, *Moment*, pp. 22-23.
¹⁴ Alan Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*, (London: Unwin Hyman, Ltd, 1988), pp. 137-140.
¹⁵ Maggie Hyde, “The Cock and the Chameleon,” in *The Imaginal Cosmos: Astrology, Divination and the Sacred*, ed. Angela Voss and Jean Hinson Lall, (Canterbury: University of Kent, 2007), p. 51.

(this concern proved correct, as will be noted in the exploration of interview content). “Supernatural,” “paranormal” and “metaphysical” were felt to imply possible connotations that might lead respondents to ignore natural omens—including the natural celestial cycles employed in astrology. “Transpersonal” was chosen in hopes that it would be familiar to both astrologically involved and uninvolved subjects. It is a term drawn from a branch of psychology to classify experiences of awareness, “which involve...connectedness with phenomena considered outside the boundaries of the ego...including...intuitive wisdom.”¹⁶ Transpersonal psychologists also accept and work with altered states of consciousness (ASC’s),¹⁷ those states of mind considered characteristic of the *mantis*, the ancient oracular receiver of wisdom “outside the boundaries of the ego.”¹⁸ “Transpersonal” also designates a type of astrology created by astrological author Dane Rudhyar, whose writings are well-known to the American astrological community. Rudhyar’s philosophy advocates the necessity for an individual’s ego to allow, “the descent of spiritual, supernal forces.”¹⁹ It was, admittedly, unknown whether astrologically uninvolved respondents might be confused by the term; the quality of that group’s survey responses proved this not to be the case.

The survey consisted of two sections. Section I requested demographic data, divided into two sub-sections. The first sub-section asked for gender, birth year and number of years of involvement with astrology. The next sub-section attempted to determine the level of a respondent’s involvement with astrology, for the reason explained above. Activities used to rate depth of involvement included use of/participation in and/or creation of astrological calendars, publications, articles, books, classes, certification programmes, organisations, conferences and astrological research, as well as whether a respondent consulted astrologers and/or gave readings. A specific question asked whether respondents used astrology to manage physical and/or spiritual aspects of their lives. Respondents were also invited to list those categories of astrology of greatest interest to them.

¹⁶ Marc C. Kaspro, M.D. and Bruce W. Scotton, M.D., “A Review of Transpersonal Theory and Its Application to the Practice of Psychotherapy,” *The Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research* 8:1, (Winter 1999): [hereafter, Kaspro and Scotton, “Transpersonal”], 12.

¹⁷ Kaspro and Scotton, “Transpersonal,” 17-20.

¹⁸ Dorian Greenbaum, “Rising to the Occasion,” in *The Imaginal Cosmos*, ed. Angela Voss and Jean Hinson Lall, (Canterbury: University of Kent, 2007), [hereafter, Greenbaum, “Rising”], pp. 9-10.

¹⁹ Dane Rudhyar, *The Astrology of Transformation: A Multilevel Approach*, (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1994 [1980]), p. 97.

Section II requested actual data on transpersonal/divine guidance methods employed. Respondents were first asked if they ever sought guidance from “a Higher Power or The Universe” when facing life challenges. A list of life challenges was offered with an additional blank category for respondents to enter their own ideas or experiences. The eight issues chosen have presented in clients seeking the researcher’s astrological consulting services. They reflect a combination of: (a) possible subjects of divinatory/transpersonal inquiry listed by Loewe and Blacker: “future events, past disasters whose causes cannot be explained, things hidden from sight or removed in space, appropriate conduct in critical situations, including the healing of illness, determining the times and modes of religious worship, and making choices of persons for particular tasks;”²⁰ and (b) ideas drawn from astrological texts:²¹

- A. Struggling to decide on a course of action.
- B. Feeling a loss of focus or purpose.
- C. Feeling that a part or the whole of life has lost meaning.
- D. Wondering if a seemingly random event has meaning.
- E. A life-changing event happening without warning.
- F. Regaining something or someone precious that has been lost.
- G. Desire to know the outcome of an endeavour.
- H. Hoping to influence the outcome of an endeavour.

Respondents were asked to relate how they sought transpersonal/divine guidance for each issue, and to leave blank any that did not apply; the survey form provided space to extemporise as little or as much as they wished. A deliberately uncategorised list of possible transpersonal/divine guidance methods was attached for their reference. Survey instructions urged respondents not to confine themselves to the list, however; this was done in hopes of encouraging more genuine, rather than more guided, responses. Different astrological practices were scattered randomly throughout the list; this was also deliberate, in an effort not to force respondents to consider only astrological means of transpersonal/divine guidance.

Discussion: The Survey

Thirty of fifty-eight potential subjects responded to the survey. The average age was fifty-five; only one respondent was under forty. Respondents were chiefly female; only six (20%) respondents were male. Twenty-seven respondents stated they sought transpersonal/divine guidance in times of life challenge.

²⁰ Loewe and Blacker, *Oracles*, p. 189.

²¹ Nicholas Campion, *The Practical Astrologer*, (Bristol: Cinnabar Books, 1993), pp. 8-9; also William Lilly, *Christian Astrology*, Book 2: The Resolution of all manner of Questions and Demands, (Exeter: Regulus Publishing, 1985 [1647]), pp. 196-486.

The first notable finding was one respondent’s significant addition to the life issues list: being forced to endure an ongoing stressful situation. I judged the omission of this issue an oversight since it has been a frequent reason that potential astrological clients seek my services. Survey respondents were re-contacted electronically and offered the opportunity to return additional comment on the issue; only nine of the thirty did so. Their responses are documented in the findings but cannot be accorded the same level of significance as the rest of the data since this issue was not part of the original survey.

Twenty (66.6%) of the thirty subjects reported that they used astrological methods to seek transpersonal/divine guidance. Fourteen (87.5%) of the sixteen astrologically involved subjects did so, as did seven (50%) of the fourteen non-involved subjects. Non-involved subjects used astrology for fewer life issues (see Table 1, below).

Table 1: Who Uses Astrology to Seek Guidance for What Life Issues?

LIFE ISSUE	ASTROLOGERS (16)	NON- ASTROLOGERS (14)
A. Deciding Between Courses of Action	62.5% (10)	21.4% (3)
B. Feeling Rootless, Lost, Unfocused	43.7% (7)	
C. Dealing with Meaninglessness in Life	37.5% (6)	
D. Seeking Meaning in Random Events	43.7% (7)	21.4% (3)
E. Sudden Life-Changing Events	62.5% (10)	14.2% (2)
F. Loss of Something / Someone Precious	50.0% (8)	7.1% (1)
G. Wishing Insight into Future Outcome	62.5% (10)	7.1% (1)
H. Wishing to Influence Future Outcome	50.0% (8)	7.1% (1)
Other: Ongoing Stressful Situation*	4 of 5	4 of 4

***NOTE:** Out of 9 respondents on the issue of enduring a stressful situation, 5 were astrologically involved and 4 were not. Since 100% of non-involved respondents said they used astrology to help them with this issue it suggests that my own professional evaluation of its importance is valid.

The most common astrological methods chosen for purposes of transpersonal/divine guidance are shown in Table 2, below. Horary, which some astrological commentators have deemed astrology’s most openly divinatory

form,²² was used in preference to other methods for only two situations: deciding between courses of action (A) and finding lost objects (F). The combination of natal with personal predictive analysis was reported as used for every issue, with a sudden life-changing event (E) being the most common situation for which it was employed. The life issue for which the widest variety of astrological methods was employed was the desire to influence a future outcome (H).

Table 2: Number of Subjects Who Used the Following Astrological Methods for Nine Life Issues

LIFE ISSUE	Personal Natal/Predictive	Horary Question	Election	Event Chart	General Mundane Cycles	Astrological Ritual	Synastry
A	1	7					
B	7						
C	3						
D	5			2			
E	8			2			
F	1	6					1
G	4	1		3		1	
H	2		4	1	1	3	
Other	3	1					

NOTE: Definitions of astrological methodologies:

- Personal Natal/Predictive refers to analysis of a birth chart and its evolving trends;
- Horary refers to a horoscope cast for the moment of asking a question;
- Elections refer to choosing astrologically benefic times to begin an enterprise;
- Event charts refer to horoscopes of occurrences such as earthquakes, accidents, movie releases, etc.

²² Patrick Curry, “Varieties of Astrological Experience” in Roy Willis and Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon*, (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2004), Chapter 6, p. 67.

- General mundane cycles refer to regular celestial phenomena such as lunar phases, eclipses, planetary movements and ingresses into zodiacal signs;
- Astrological rituals, private or public, may be celebratory or magical/theurgic in intent;
- Synastry compares horoscopes to evaluate the relationship between them, as between two people, a birth chart and subsequent event chart(s), even two unrelated charts.

Table 3, which combines the two surveyed populations, demonstrates what may be a very striking finding, given this study's hypothesis. Survey subjects reported using astrological methods as the preferred way of seeking transpersonal/divine guidance for all but three life issues: loss of focus (B), meaninglessness (C) and regaining something/someone lost (F) (the dominant method reported for dealing with a loss involved accepting it, grieving and moving on, even amongst astrologers). Astrological methods were tied with prayer as the preferred method of seeking to influence an outcome (H). The astrologically uninvolved seekers reported a higher use of prayer and used astrology as their method of choice only for attempting to find meaning in random events (D) and enduring ongoing stressful situations (Other).

It will be seen that the numbers of practices reported are greater than the number of respondents. This is because eighteen (60%) of the thirty respondents used one or more of the additional categories of divinatory methods *in conjunction with* astrological methods for any given issue. Astrological methods, especially natal/predictive analysis, appeared to provide insight into unfolding patterns, with an additional method employed to seek specifics: "[I] Look at transit, [sic] progressions, solar arcs for general patterns, then do...shamanic journey work, tarot, meditation." The most frequently used additional methods—each chosen by ten of the eighteen—were ASC Practices and Transpersonal Consultation.

Table 3: Number of Subjects Using a Given Divinatory Method for Nine Life Issues

LIFE ISSUE	Astrology	Oracles	ASC Practice	Serenity Practice	Attitudinal Practice	Trans-Personal Consult	Prayer
A	13	9	6	2		10	6
B	7	7	8	6	2	5	7
C	6	2	8	4	5	3	4
D	10	4	6	1		4	4

E	12	4	5	2	3	5	4
F	9	4	6	1	11	4	3
G	11	6	2	2	3	3	5
H	8	3	4	1	6	3	8
Other	8	3	2	5	3	3	6

Categorizing the survey’s “laundry list” of transpersonal/divine guidance methods posed a challenge. A classification scheme of bidden vs. unbidden (Curry) or provoked vs. unprovoked (Rochberg) was unsuitable, as seekers of guidance are already bidding/provoking a sign.²³ Tedlock’s continuum of inductive-interpretative-intuitive practices also posed a problem due to the researcher’s unfamiliarity with that frame of reference.²⁴ Instead, a phenomenological approach reminiscent of grounded theory practices was adopted, allowing a classification system to emerge from iterative analysis of raw data, “without a rigid set of ideas that shape what he or she focuses on.”²⁵ The relevant survey section was designed to resemble a semi-structured interview; the responses themselves were analysed to guide the creation of a classification system, (one under constant revision as data accumulated). A qualitative approach to the classification of quantitatively collected data is unorthodox, but not completely without justification; Bob Dick argues, “The theory is emergent... The methods can be emergent too...any data collection methods can be used.”²⁶ The complete list of transpersonal/divine guidance methods reported by respondents under their assigned categories, along with detailed explanations of those categories comprises the Appendix.

²³ Patrick Curry, “Divination, Enchantment and Platonism,” in *The Imaginal Cosmos*, ed. Angela Voss and Jean Hinson Lall, (Canterbury: University of Kent, 2007), pp. 42-43; also Francesca Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 3.

²⁴ Tedlock, *Folklore*, p. 191.

²⁵ Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998), p. 215.

²⁶ Bob Dick, “Grounded theory: a thumbnail sketch,” in Resource Papers in Action Research, maintained by Bob Dick, v1.07, last revised 11/06/2005, sections ‘Overview’ and ‘Data Collection’, http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/grounded.html#a_gt_data.

Discussion: The Interviews

Interviews were conducted with four survey subjects. Adele (all names are pseudonyms) is a practicing professional astrological consultant and teacher. Bonnie is an aspiring professional astrological consultant. Claire is somewhat anomalous, an aspiring consultant who does not manifest deep astrological involvement as defined by the survey parameters; although enrolled in a course for professional certification and giving readings, this is the extent of her involvement. Doris is best classed as an ardent amateur who does not give consultations, teach or write but employs her knowledge in managing her life. Three of the four have been involved with astrology for more than twenty years and are deeply involved now, as defined by the survey parameters: they purchase and use astrological planners/calendars; read both online and print publications; avidly acquire and read books; attend classes, workshops and conferences; belong to local or national organizations. One is seeking, and one has attained, professional certification of some kind. Three use astrology to assist them with practical affairs, and all of them use it as a part of their spiritual lives. Finally, all are among the respondents who use additional divinatory methods in conjunction with astrology.

The interviews were informal and loosely structured, with deeper investigation of survey responses used as a starting point. Thus, each interview began with an initial exploration of different issues depending on what had been entered in the survey. To explore stated study objectives, care was taken to introduce the following topics at some point in each interview: whether interviewees viewed astrology as a divinatory art; whether they experienced “sudden bursts of insight” and their perceptions of those insights’ source(s) when seeking guidance for themselves or counselling others; whether they interpreted astrological indicators of their own issues themselves, or consulted practitioners.

None of the interviewees—all American—claimed familiarity with the concept of astrology as a form of divination. My mention of the subject appeared to constitute the first time they had been made aware of the idea. None who attended local and national conferences expressed awareness of any debate, public or private, on the topic. No one disagreed with the idea; all seemed intrigued, although no one offered further comment than, “Hmmm...interesting!”

Like other survey respondents, they used astrology to discern general patterns, but used other guidance methods for specifics, chiefly by meditating (Claire and Doris) consulting with spirit guides (Adele and Doris) or one’s own inner Self (Bonnie and Claire). When I asked Claire explicitly, “is the guidance perceived to be from within yourself, or your inner connection to something that’s “out there?” she paused at least ten seconds before replying. “I’m not sure I would define it as either of those...It is connecting, I guess, with a cosmic

intelligence via information I receive through my senses.” In contrast, Adele and Doris both reported a clear sense of connecting to something “out there.” The question of whether a diviner simply tunes into inner guidance or connects to something truly trans-personal would need further investigation.

“Have you ever...had that...sensation that all of a sudden something came together and you spoke something that you hadn’t planned to say?” Both Adele and Bonnie reported this. “All the time!” Bonnie replied, and added, “I feel much more comfortable with that, a lot of times, than the actual definitions and descriptions of the house placement and the planet.” Whereas Bonnie was certain that her insights derived from the chart, Adele reported a distinctly trans-personal information source when she read for others: “I am positive that the way I work with my guides is that...a client...talks to hers, hers talk to mine, mine talk to me. And then I’ll talk to her.” She admitted that information obtained in this fashion might have little connection to anything represented in the client’s chart.

None of the interviewees, however, reported this kind of effect when reading their own charts for their personal issues (nb: This question was not explicitly asked and should be explored in further research). The lack of this effect might be a contributing factor that leads them to consult other astrological professionals concerning the astrological indicators of their personal issues. Adele and Doris regularly consulted other astrologers. Adele said she needs, “a new pair of eyes...because I’m emotionally involved in my own life so...I can miss really big things.” Doris follows a careful procedure: “if I can’t figure it out, I have...other...astrologers who help me...when I have the three...and it still gives me the same answer, then I know I’m on the right path.” For both, the different perspectives increase their confidence in the astrological information. It was not clearly stated whether the additional perspective sought was that of the *mantis* (the receiver) or the *prophētēs* (the interpreter).²⁷ Possibly it is both; or possibly one pair of eyes is sought for one function, while another pair is consulted for the other (this, too, is speculation, since this question was not explicitly asked). The possible mistrust in or lack of their own astrological insight on personal issues also suggests a reason why they—and perhaps other survey respondents—employ other divinatory techniques in addition to astrology. This possibility also requires further research.

Bonnie stated that she consults other astrologers chiefly to further her own education, less and less for her own issues as her expertise grows (although she did say (echoing Doris), “I want some backup with what I think”). Only Claire did not consult other professionals for her own issues, saying, “as far as my own, oftentimes it’s pretty obvious...the Universe provides many opportunities of

²⁷ Greenbaum, “Rising,” p. 10.

affirming...what things are to be addressed.” Answers to further inquiries suggested that she is training herself to use astrology as a combination of Serenity and Attitudinal Practice: “When someone can understand from a larger context that the experience was really created earlier on...then it’s easier to...help...see the ownership; to embrace that it really is a gift...an opportunity to transform what they were holding originally...to create a different outcome.”

This raises a suggestion that may shed light on the confusion concerning astrology’s definition as a divinatory art. For seekers of transpersonal/divine guidance, astrology may not function as a single category of divinatory practice, despite the fact that its information is derived from a single source: “the immutable database of the night sky.”²⁸ For the study participants, their wide variety of astrological practices appear to function sometimes as Oracles (as with horary or event charts), sometimes as ASC Practices (particularly when reading for others), and sometimes as Serenity or Attitudinal Practices (as implied by Claire). They may even function as Transpersonal Consultation vehicles, as when Thorley’s subjects reported the experience of the chart “speaking” or that they engaged in a dialogue with it.²⁹ Further research is needed to begin to discern whether different astrological practices are best classed as different types of divinatory practices, rather than a single one

Discussion: The Researcher

This study is an example of research conducted by an “insider”, or from an “emic” perspective when, as described by Kenneth Pike, a member of a group conducts research on its own members.³⁰ I was effectively an insider twice over in the astrological community since all but one study respondent were personal acquaintances. One advantage of this circumstance was that my status as colleague and acquaintance appeared to enhance respondents’ comfort and trust levels; I inferred this both from the interviewees’ willingness to share their experiences and the frequently detailed quality of survey responses. A second was an enhanced ability to interpret survey responses and follow interviewees’ conversation, due to familiarity with the concepts and terms. A final advantage was that, seeking to honour the trust I felt had been given—I discovered, from comments made by survey respondents that seeking transpersonal/divine

²⁸ Clive Ruggles and Nicholas Saunders, “The Study of Cultural Astronomy”, in *Astronomies and Cultures*, ed. Clive Ruggles and Nicholas Saunders, (Colorado: University of Colorado Press, 1993), p 9.

²⁹ Thorley, *Correlation*, pp 20-21.

³⁰ Kenneth L. Pike, “Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behavior in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, ed. Russell McCutcheon, (London: Cassell, 1999), p. 28.

guidance is a sensitive topic—made me strive to be a meticulous and careful reporter.

The disadvantage of being “doubly emic” with all one’s research subjects is the limitation (in addition to the smallness of the sample size) of the applicability of the findings to a broader population. In order to repeat this type of study with a broader—and unfamiliar—population, my interviewing skills would need improvement; being already on personal terms with the study’s four interviewees made it easier for them to understand me, as much as it made it easier for me to understand them.

Conclusion

This study’s hypothesis—that astrological “consumers” use astrology for divinatory purposes—appears to be supported by this small, preliminary study. Surveys successfully gathered information on reported methods of seeking transpersonal/divine guidance and revealed that a variety of astrological techniques were chief among the methods used, although less so by astrologically uninvolved subjects. Further, it was seen that multiple ways of seeking transpersonal/divine guidance were employed in conjunction with astrology. Confirming this phenomenon and exploring its causes in more depth are worthy of further study. The preliminary data suggest that further research is also needed to understand the reasons a professional astrologer consults other professionals, especially for astrologically derived information. Finally, the question of astrology’s inclusion in many different classifications of divination—for which a new classification scheme of transpersonal guidance/divinatory practices was devised that must be subjected to revision and refinement—needs further examination.

Thus, for all the information this preliminary pilot study has uncovered, new avenues of inquiry have been suggested that will need to be explored to fully understand the contribution of the client to the divinatory enterprise.

APPENDIX 1:

SEEKING TRANSPERSONAL GUIDANCE QUESTIONNAIRE

PART I: ABOUT YOU

GENDER:	BIRTH YEAR:	YEARS OF INVOLVEMENT w/ASTROLOGY:	WSAA MEMBER?
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WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT WITH ASTROLOGY?

Enter "Y" next to any that apply to you; leave blank any that *don't* apply to you.

CALENDARS/PLANNERS?	Read:	Write/Publish:
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MAGAZINES/NEWSLETTERS?	Read:	Write/Publish:
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WEBSITES/BLOGS?	Comment/Post:	Write/Manage:
-----------------	---------------	---------------

BOOKS?	Read:	Write/Publish:
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LECTURES/WORKSHOPS?	Attend:	Teach:
---------------------	---------	--------

REGULAR CLASS SERIES?	Attend:	Teach:
-----------------------	---------	--------

CERTIFICATION/DIPLOMA ?	Working on:	Attained:
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CONSULT AN ASTROLOGER?	Occasionally:	Regularly:
------------------------	---------------	------------

GIVE ASTROLOGICAL CONSULTATIONS?	For Free:	For Pay:
----------------------------------	-----------	----------

ORGANIZATIONS?	Member:	Officer:
----------------	---------	----------

CONFERENCES?	Attend:	Present at:
--------------	---------	-------------

USE ASTROLOGY TO MANAGE LIFE ACTIVITIES?	Practical:	Spiritual:
--	------------	------------

DO RESEARCH?	Practical:	Academic/Statistical:
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OTHER:

WHAT TYPES OF ASTROLOGY ARE OF GREATEST INTEREST TO YOU?

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PART II: SEEKING TRANSPERSONAL GUIDANCE

When life challenges occur we may seek help. When they do, do you ever ask for guidance in some way from a Higher Power / The Universe? Yes: No:

IF YOU ANSWERED “YES”, HOW DO YOU *MOST USUALLY* SEEK THAT GUIDANCE WHEN:
[See Attachment 1 for ideas, if you like. However, I’m most interested in what *you* do.]

You have to decide between different courses of action?

You feel rootless, unfocused or lost?

Life seems meaningless (either in part or in general)?

You wonder if a so-called random event(s) has special meaning?

A life-changing event occurs without warning?

You lose something/someone precious that you want to regain?

You wish you had a better idea of the outcome of an important endeavor?

You want to influence the outcome of an endeavor?

Other:

WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO GRANT ME THE FAVOR OF AN ANONYMOUS, FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW? IF YOU WOULD, PLEASE FILL IN YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION. I WILL CONTACT YOU IF I NEED TO, TO ARRANGE A CONVENIENT DAY AND TIME. [YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION IS COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL.]

NAME:

EMAIL:

PHONE / SKYPE NAME:

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

APPENDIX 2: Categorisation of Divinatory Methods

I use the term 'Oracles' for methods of symbol interpretation that contain the element of randomness described by Greene. These might involve formally organised symbol systems, such as Tarot or I Ching, or personal, idiosyncratic systems such as might occur from dream revelation or bibliomancy.

'ASC Practices' are ways of deliberately stimulating Altered States of Consciousness (ASC)—to become a *mantis*—such as scrying (water- mirror-crystal- or candle-gazing), meditation or chanting. The reported methods were striking for their gentleness; no one reported the use of toxic, mind-altering substances or physical ordeals such as fasting, violent exercise or the sweat lodge. I chose to create a separate category entitled 'Serenity Practices' that seemed to involve ways to attain a calm, centered state of normal waking consciousness, rather than an altered state. Physical means—walking, yoga or breath work—were reported, as were mental techniques—journaling, artistic/literature contemplation. As with the ASC Practices, the methods chosen were gentle, as opposed to punishing.

'Attitudinal Practices' refer to mental/emotional disciplines undertaken to alter perspective, and perhaps, in the process, affect the outcome of a situation; examples include visualizations, affirmations, "intention work". Practicing a trusting or accepting inner stance is included under this category; those who do this are not looking for a 'sign'; rather, they are (a) trusting that guidance is present without a sign or (b) striving to view the situation itself as the sign. Thus, these activities may not qualify as truly divinatory. Still, for those who said they use them, they are employed as a way of interacting with the transpersonal/divine.

I separated 'Transpersonal Consultation' from 'Prayer' based on the attitude expressed by a respondent. Did (s)he approach a guru, Deity, guardian angel, "spirit guide", psychic, "higher self" as a potentially empowered co-creator ('whether I feel I've got an answer depends on how well I pay attention.') or as a powerless supplicant ('I always end with "not my will, but Thine be done."')? Included in this category are non-verbal dowsing methods that allow seekers to obtain answers to questions via physical responses: the swing of a pendulum, the sudden weakness in a particular muscle.

SOME METHODS OF SEEKING TRANSPERSONAL GUIDANCE

Past Life Reading or Regression	Sacrificial Offering
Visiting a Beloved or Sacred Site	Tea Leaf Reading
I Ching	Horary Astrology Question
Tarot or Other Cards	Kinesiology (Muscle Testing)
Rune Casting	Scrying, i.e., Mirror, Water or
Crystal Gazing	
Shamanic Journeying	Astrological Karmic Analysis
Meditation	Vision Questing
Séance	Palmistry
Natal Horoscope Analysis	Physical Privation Ritual, i.e.,
	Sweat Lodge, Fasting
Channeling, Channeled Information	Private Ritual Practice
Dowsing	Consciousness-Altering
	Substance
Rebirthing or Holotropic Breathwork	Ouija Board
Psychic Reading	Evolutionary Astrological
	Analysis
Dream Work	Chanting, Drumming
Trance Dancing	Spirit Guides
Formal Religious Ceremony	Coin Toss
Astrologically Timed Ritual or Ceremony, either personal or collective	
Direct Prayer to a Deity, Patron Saint, Guardian Angel, Archangel, Higher Self,	
Aumakua	
Predictive Astrological Analysis, i.e., Transits, Progressions, Directions, Solar	
Returns	
Bibliomancy, i.e., letting a sacred / special text fall open and reading the first lines	
seen	
Religious or Spiritual Counsellor, i.e., Priest, Guru, Other Spiritual Teacher	

SEEKING TRANSPERSONAL GUIDANCE

Astrological Practice:	Natal Chart
Analysis	Personal Predictive
	Analysis
	Horary
	Chart
	Electional
	Chart
	Event
	Chart
	Mundane Cycle
	Analysis
	Astrologically Timed
	Ritual
	Synastry
Other Oracles:	I
Ching	Tarot/Other
	Cards
	Bibliomancy
	Stay Alert For
	Sign
	Dream
	Work
	Palmistry
	Numerology
Consciousness Altering Practice:	Chanting/Drumming/
Dancing	Shamanic
	Journeying

	<u>Meditation</u>
	<u>Scrying</u>
	<u>Candle</u>
	<u>Lighting</u>
<u>Serenity Practice:</u>	<u>Visit Beloved/Sacred</u>
<u>Site</u>	<u>Walking/</u>
	<u>Yoga</u>
	<u>Journalling/Creative</u>
	<u>Writing</u>
	<u>Artistic</u>
	<u>Creation</u>
	<u>Artistic/Literature</u>
	<u>Contemplation</u>
<u>Attitudinal Practice:</u>	<u>Trust &</u>
<u>Wait</u>	<u>Visualization/Affirmation/Intention</u>
	<u>Work</u>
	<u>“Let</u>
	<u>Go”</u>
	<u>Positive</u>
	<u>Focus</u>
<u>Transpersonal Consultation:</u>	<u>Religious/Spiritual</u>
<u>Counsellor</u>	<u>Channelling/Psychic</u>
	<u>Reading</u>
	<u>Kinesiology/Dowsing/</u>
	<u>Pendulum</u>
	<u>“Inner Self”/Inner</u>
	<u>Wisdom</u>
	<u>Higher</u>
	<u>Self</u>
	<u>Spirit</u>
	<u>Guides</u>

Prayer:

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“Sacred Space is a Human Construct. Can the Eton Rowing Centre be classed as a Sacred Space?

by Joyce Lambert

The Eton Rowing Centre, an international standard rowing lake, was constructed and privately funded by Eton College and was the rowing venue at the London Olympics of 2012. The site has been extensively landscaped and is offered as a public amenity, contains a stone circle surrounding an armillary sphere and sundial. Although information plaques on the site indicated Neolithic and Bronze Age burials, this seems an incongruous choice of sculpture for an international rowing lake. The symbol of the circle enclosing the armillary sphere as a model of the sky suggests that an essentially profane space might once have been sacred. And if it had been could this modern development re-confer that sacredness? My research led me to the conclusion that the natural landscape held an indigenous sense of sacredness that brought together many separate elements, all of which contained memories of an ancient sacred past, thereby creating by association a symbolic sacredness on the site.

Introduction

The Eton Rowing Centre - an international standard rowing lake - was constructed and privately funded by Eton College, primarily to provide a safe rowing facility for its pupils.¹ It was completed in 2006 and is situated in Dorney in Berkshire. Dorney is perhaps less well-known than its neighbour on the opposite bank of the River Thames - Windsor – where William the Conqueror (1028-1087) first constructed Windsor’s famous castle. The 450-acre site is also a public amenity, with its central lake, extensive arboretum and open spaces. And it was walking on the site with my dog that I encountered a stone circle surrounding a stainless steel armillary sphere and sundial, and was inspired to carry out this research project. It seemed an almost incongruous choice for a sculpture on an international rowing lake, and yet on the other hand it made me wonder what had been there before. Had this site, essentially a profane space, once been sacred in any way and if so had that sense of sacredness been recreated with the development of the Rowing Centre?

¹ <http://www.dorneylake.co.uk/about1.html> accessed 5.12.2011

Methodology

Prior to construction, excavations were carried out at the site by Oxford Archaeology, and Tim Allen, the project director, made publications and background documents available to me. Eton College put me in touch with Mr Roderick Watson, a key figure in bringing the project to its fruition. Other information on the site has been gleaned via visits to local libraries and general exploration of the area.

What is Sacredness?

It is important to first of all comprehend exactly what is meant by sacred, and it is here that scholars appear to hold different views. Mircea Eliade and Emile Durkheim are both influential thinkers on the subject of sacredness, yet they seem to be diametrically opposed in their opinions. Durkheim regards an object or place as being “made sacred by groups of people who set them apart and keep them bounded by specific actions.”² In his opinion, although over time sacredness becomes as though it is built into a place, it can only remain sacred for as long as there is a continuation of the beliefs and practices associated with it.³

Eliade, however, draws a distinction between sacred non-homogenous space which religious man experiences and neutral homogenous profane space.⁴ Eliade argues that sacred space is distinguished from other places and only religious man can discover it. It is a property of the place and whilst man can strive to consecrate a space it is via religious ritual that he “reproduces the work of the gods”.⁵ It is this hierophany of sacred space which gives a break in space revealing a fixed point for the orientation and the effective founding of the world.⁶ Swan agrees with Eliade, considering that locations almost call out on an unconscious level as opposed to being chosen at random.⁷

For Otto sacredness equates to holiness itself and for Brereton the sacred place is where humans enter the realm of the gods.⁸ Both Otto and Eliade, in

² Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields, New York: The Free Press, 1995, introduction by Fields p xlvi.

³ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Carol Cosman, Oxford University Press, 2001, p xviii. (Hereafter, Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans by Cosman)

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane, the Nature of Religion*, A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., Florida, 1959. p20 (Hereafter, Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*)

⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p29

⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p21-2

⁷ James A. Swan, *The Power of Place, Sacred Ground in Natural & Human Environments, An Anthology*, Gateway Books, 1993, p1 (Hereafter, Swan, *The Power of Place*)

⁸ J.P. Brereton, *Sacred Space in Mircea Eliade, The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, vol 12, New York: Macmillan Publishing co. 1987, p526

Johnson's view, imply that the sacred is "pre-existent, static, and that the experience of the sacred is passive apprehension rather than active construction".⁹ In a similar vein Hughes and Swan view sacred space as where human beings find a manifestation of divine power and cite the traditional Indians for whom all places are sacred.¹⁰

Tilley perhaps aligns more with Durkheim in viewing the landscape as encultured by man and created symbolically meaningful by making it "an intelligible and socialised form", whilst Bender considers that a place becomes sacred according to the reverence it is given and how it affects the individual's feeling of his place within the universe.¹¹ Similarly, Devereux considers that sacredness depends on an exchange taking place "between the physical place and the human mind and body".¹²

Thorley & Gunn, however, have provided an operational definition for a sacred site or place - "a place in the landscape, occasionally over or under water, which is especially revered by a people, culture or cultural group as a focus for spiritual belief and practice or likely religious observance". Additionally Thorley and Gunn give a list of nineteen characteristics of sacredness to be satisfied on at least one level.¹³

The Excavations

The rowing lake is situated between two large ditched causewayed enclosures from the Neolithic (4000-2200BCE) period, one of which is within the grounds of the Centre. Excavations at the site revealed crucial information on burial customs from the Neolithic and early Bronze Age (2200-1500BCE).¹⁴

⁹ Norris Brock Johnson, *Garden as Sacred Space: Transformation of Consciousness at Tenryu Temple* in Swan, *The Power of Place*, p182-3

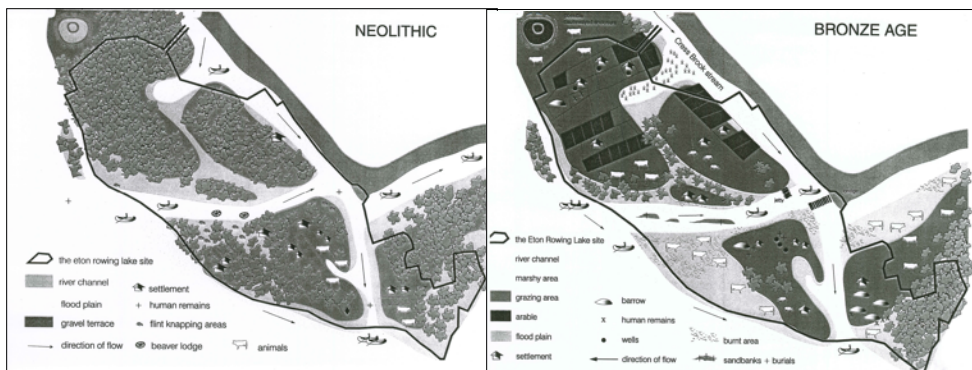
¹⁰ J. Donald Hughes and J.Swan, *How much of the Earth is Sacred Space?*, *Environmental Review: ER*, Vol 10, No. 4 (Winter, 1986), pp247-8

¹¹ Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, Berg Publishers, 1994, p67 (Hereafter, Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*); Thomas Bender, *Making Places Sacred* in Swan, *The Power of Place*, pp323-4

¹² Paul Devereux, *The Sacred Place, The Ancient Origins of Holy and Mystical Sites*, Cassell & Co, 2000, p26, (Hereafter Devereux, *The Sacred Place*)

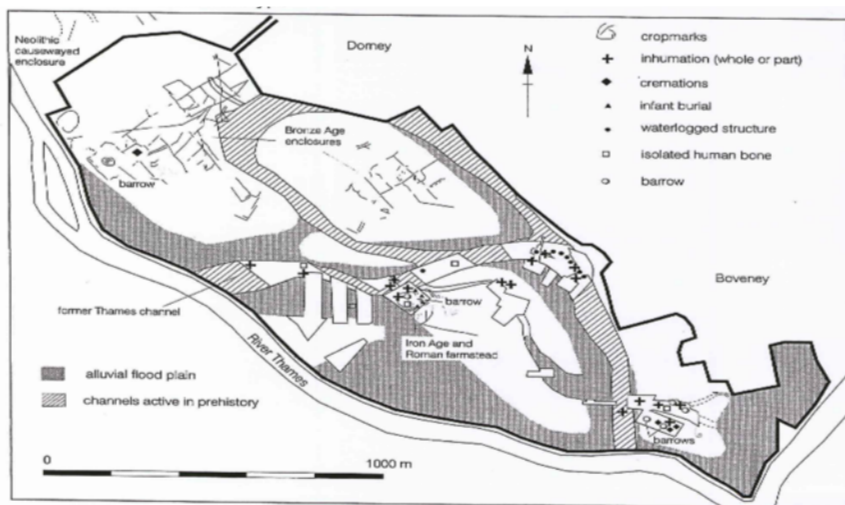
¹³ Anthony Thorley and Celia M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview, A Report for the Gaia Foundation (Abridged Version)*, http://www.sacrednaturalsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Sacred_Sites_An_Overview.pdf accessed 5.11.2011, p 12 (Hereafter Thorley and Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*)

¹⁴ Tim Allen, *Eton Rowing Course at Dorney Lake – The Burial Traditions*, The Archives and History Initiative of Tarmac Ltd., Volume IV, 2000 Garner Press, p 104 (Hereafter Allen, *The Burial Traditions*)



Diagrams above show how water flowed from Cress Brook Stream on right, across the site as the Ancient Thames and into the Modern Thames on the left

From the Neolithic period evidence of ritual placing of skulls and possibly whole bodies in the river and within refuse deposits after display ritual were discovered.¹⁵ Three main barrows and enclosing ditches from the early Bronze Age revealed what appears to be a local custom of the placing of vessels or parts of vessels alongside the cremated remains, as well as the ritual burial of a male with the deliberate offering of a pike bone in the front of his body.¹⁶



Plan of excavation site showing three main barrows, Neolithic causewayed enclosure, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman areas, and flow of river

¹⁵ Allen, *The Burial Traditions*, p86

¹⁶ Allen, *The Burial Traditions*, p86

A square of four postholes was found in the middle of one barrow, suggesting a building where ritual offerings were left.¹⁷

Animal burials, suggestive of offerings, were also discovered, mainly cattle with a sheep placed at the feet of one of the cattle, as well as a mare and neo-natal foal. The skeleton of a dog and bowl, possibly holding offering to the gods rather than food for the afterlife may indicate the valued status of dogs and indeed Tilley states that the vast bulk of domestic animal bones from the British Neolithic period occur on ceremonial rather than domestic sites.¹⁸



Cattle skeleton with a sheep placed at feet

Bridges discovered from the late 6th century BCE and 3rd century BCE not only acted functionally but also as platforms for burial into the river and ritual offerings to the water.¹⁹ Wooden posts in the former Thames channel were also sites of ritual offerings of bowls, as well as an antler placed upon a complete ox skull, and provided evidence that the sandbanks had been used for ritual purpose.²⁰ Excavations showed a tradition of ritual in all aspects of Neolithic life

¹⁷ Tim Allen e-mail 21.11.2011; Allen, *The Burial Traditions*, p84

¹⁸ Tim Allen, Alistair Barclay and Hugo Lamdin-Whymark, *Opening the Wood, Making the Land: The Study of a Neolithic landscape in the Dorney area of the Middle Thames Valley*; South Midlands Archaeology, Allen, *The Burial Traditions* p97; Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p206

¹⁹ South Midlands Archaeology, No. 28, 1998, CBA, South Midlands Group; Allen, *The Burial Traditions*, p94

²⁰ South Midlands Archaeology, No 31, 2001, CBA, South Midlands Group; Allen, *The Burial Traditions* P90

and “the absence of a distinction between secular and religious activity as we understand these concepts”.²¹

The last burial on the site after abandonment as a settlement around 400AD - a Saxon woman dating from 430-660BCE, together with jewellery - suggests an attempt to legitimise the foundation of new settlements by linking with the dead of the past.²²

Is there evidence for the site of the Eton Rowing Centre having been sacred?

The placing of burial sites in prominent view by the river in both the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods accords with Thorley & Gunn’s definition of a sacred site as a place “revered and used for likely religious observance”.²³ Furthermore it satisfies three points of Thorley & Gunn’s characteristics: On a descriptive level the site has been founded on a natural topographical feature - the River Thames; on a spiritual level the site identifies with the ancestors as a burial ground; on a functional level excavation has identified an area of ritual burial and ceremony, a place set aside for communication with sacred Gods.²⁴

In terms of burials, rituals and offerings connected with the river, Eliade notes the symbolism of the purification and regeneration properties of water as well as the link between immersion in water and future rebirth.²⁵ For Eliade, therefore, the topographical features could indicate innate sacredness, whilst the continued tradition of burial rituals could reflect Durkheim’s belief in the construction of sacred space using “rules of conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things”.²⁶ For Swan all gravesites are sacred linking the worlds of the living and the dead.²⁷

Lewis-Williams and Pearce suggest that the Neolithic custom of circular areas surrounded by ditches pointed to the fact that the ditches were symbolic of water and of a “crossing”, or, as Eliade might view, a threshold for entry to the sacred world via ritual.²⁸ Salqhvist considers that barrows could be considered

²¹ Jonathon Cotton and David Field (Editors), *Towards a New Stone Age (Aspects of the Neolithic in South East England)*, CBA Research Report 137, 2004, Alden Group UK p97 (Hereafter, *Towards a New Stone Age*, Cotton and Field)

²² Allen, *The Burial Traditions*, p103

²³ Thorley and Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, p12

²⁴ Thorley and Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, p12

²⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp130-1

²⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p22, Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans by Cosman, p40

²⁷ Swan, *The Power of Place*, p68

²⁸ David Lewis-Williams and David Pearce, *Inside the Neolithic Mind*, Thames & Hudson, 2005, pp176-7; Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p25

as a “miniature and metaphor” for the sacred mountain which Eliade would perhaps consider as the fixed centre or “axis mundi” where communication between earth, heaven and the underworld is possible.²⁹

Development of the site to create the Eton Rowing Centre

As part of the methodology I spoke and had e-mail contact with the ex-Bursar of Eton College, Mr. Roderick Watson, who had resurrected a proposal from the 1960's for the construction of an international standard rowing lake. With his background in mining and the construction of the Channel Tunnel, he was attracted by the idea of “digging another hole”.

• The Lake

The rowing lake, considered the best course in the UK, is the focus of the site. It is a 2200m, eight-lane course, constructed to international standards and providing a facility not only for world-class training and competition, but also for the pupils of Eton College.³⁰

It appears that there has been a conscious desire for the water of the rowing lake to be as pure as possible. The land had been used previously for arable farming and was set aside for five years in order to allow any contaminants such as fertilisers to leach out in order that the water would be clean. A natural feature of the lake is that it is fed from underground aquifers, which percolate through the natural gravel filter giving excellent water quality. Barley bales are also placed at the ends of the Lake in order to discourage the growth of algae.³¹

• Landscaping and Monuments

To the western side of the lake a nature conservation area has been created and more than 30,000 trees have been planted in the Park and Arboretum, with intervening grassland giving views across the Lake itself.³²

A pair of standing stones has been erected on a high point of ground near the site of a Bronze Age enclosure at the end of an avenue of lime trees. The sight line between the stones leads the eye through a natural break in the trees



²⁹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p36; Leif Sahlqvist, *Territorial Behaviour and Communication in Ritual Landscape*, Geografiska Annaler, Series B, Human Geography, Vol 83, No. 2, 2001, p87

³⁰ <http://www.dorneylake.co.uk/twenty.html> accessed 28.10.2011

³¹ <http://www.dorneylake.co.uk/about4.html> accessed 28.10.2011

³² <http://www.dorneylake.co.uk/visiting1.html>, accessed 28.10.2011

to Windsor Castle on the horizon. There appears to have been no conscious intention to create a symbolic link to ancient standing stones such as those at Stonehenge; according to Mr Watson, “we always intended a monument to mark the sight line and a single sculpture would have obscured the view, so we decided upon a pair of stones”.



One stone has the word *INDIGENAE* inscribed on its length, referring to the indigenous nature of the trees, and every species of tree is engraved on the stones. Many trees were donated by “Old Etonians”, often in memory of loved ones, and a database of donations and commemorations is held by Eton College.³³

Another feature is the armillary sphere and sundial, presented by the consortium of gravel extracting companies, with its surrounding stone circle. According to Mr Watson, the stone circle merely evolved because something was needed to enclose the sphere and a stone circle “did the job and seemed to fit”. So once again a monument with ancient symbolism was erected seemingly without any conscious consideration. Engraved on the sphere are words devised by Eton College scholars:



Homines contra homines hic inter harenam aquamque saxumque sed omnes contra tempus contendunt.

*(Men against men, here amongst the sand and water and rock, but all struggle against time)*³⁴

³³ Old Etonians are ex-pupils of Eton College
³⁴ Inscription devised by Eton Scholars on the armillary sphere at the Eton Rowing Centre, www.dorneylake.co.uk/visiting1.html, accessed 1.11.2011

- **Tree of Light Project**

The site and the monuments are also used for “inspirational” sessions with local children who meet with a poet and write about their experience. The winners will take part in creating a symbolic Tree of Light powered by cyclists and rowers on specially adapted machines “with musicians and dancers emerging through the trees at nightfall”.³⁵

- **The Olympics**

In 2012 the rowing and kayaking sections of the Olympic Games took place at the Centre. Essentially secular, today’s Games still carry much of the sacred symbolism connected with their ancient cousin first held in 776BCE. In Ancient Greece, Games were sacred and were held in sacred sanctuaries such as Olympia where man could communicate with the gods and develop his physical and mental character.³⁶ Victors were worshipped by their communities as heroes, as are Olympians and many sporting celebrities today.³⁷ The Olympic flame is often referred to as sacred and is still lit ritually from the sun’s rays and protected so it is not extinguished until the end of the games.³⁸ Today’s athletes still also take an oath similar to the sacred oath given to the gods at the Ancient Games at Olympia.

Can the current site be classed as sacred?

The Rowing Centre, although superficially secular, appears to contain a sense of symbolic reflection back to its ancient sacred past. Durkheim points out that sometimes it is almost impossible to distinguish between secular and religious beliefs.³⁹ One of the causewayed enclosures remains within the site, a physical reminder of an area where our Neolithic ancestors came together.⁴⁰ Eliade describes a sacred place as a microcosm “because it reproduces the natural landscapes”.⁴¹ Sacred places, in his opinion, contained a tree or trees, stone and

³⁵ <http://thetreeoflight.org/page/about/>

³⁶ M. Adronicus in *The Olympic Games in Ancient Greece, Ancient Olympia and the Olympic Games*, edited by Iris Douskou, Ekdotike Athenon SA; p8 (Hereafter *The Olympic Games in Ancient Greece*)

³⁷ N. Yalouris *The Olympic Games in Ancient Greece*, pp77-80

³⁸ <http://heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/olympicflame/index.htm>, accessed 7.12.2011

³⁹ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans by Cosman, pxiii

⁴⁰ Clive Ruggles, *Ancient Astronomy, An Encyclopedia of Cosmologies and Myth*, ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2005, p100 (Hereafter Ruggles *Ancient Astronomy*)

⁴¹ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1979, p271 (hereafter Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*)

water – stone represented reality, indestructibility and lastingness, the tree manifested the power of the sacred and water represented seeds and purification – the Eton Rowing Centre contains all three elements.⁴²

The lake satisfies one of Thorley & Gunn's criteria of sacredness in that it is founded upon the natural feature of underground water. Water in itself holds its own sense of sacredness – it symbolises “the universal sum of virtualities” and supports every creation.⁴³ Casey writes that in the beginning “place” was created by the merging of bitter water with sweet water to create the places of the gods.⁴⁴ Much emphasis appears to have been placed on the purity of the water, and the underground aquifers which currently cleanse and regulate the water in the lake may in the past have fed underground springs and wells. Eliade describes that in ancient times it was believed that humans were born of the earth and that children came from ponds, springs and rivers.⁴⁵ The sacred burial sites remain, albeit hidden by the water; but they are symbolically still innate to the land as a “hierophany”, and contain the same “spirit of place” which, according to Swan, would have influenced its initial choice as a burial ground.⁴⁶

Tilley argues that in ancient societies quarrying stone was quarrying the bones of the ancestors.⁴⁷ The lake was created by the removal of stones and, therefore, to a certain extent the ancestors. In Durkheim's view the sacredness could have disappeared through this action as well as through the ceasing of the burial rituals.⁴⁸ However, according to Tilley, this would have been just another step in the social culturisation of the landscape, whilst at the same time holding the memory and sacredness within the land.⁴⁹

Birrell considers that sport once held religious meaning and is a legacy of ritual, and as such is a modern example of Durkheim's social theory of religion.⁵⁰ It could, therefore, be argued that although the burial rituals are no longer in existence they have been replaced by the daily ritual of rowing back and forth - a different, apparently secular ritual, but with its roots in religion.

⁴² Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p271

⁴³ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p130

⁴⁴ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place, A Philosophical History*, University of California Press, 1998, p25 (Hereafter, Casey *The Fate of Place*); Trans by N. K. Sandars, *Poems of Heaven and Hell from Ancient Mesopotamia*, Baltimore: Penguin 1971 p73

⁴⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p140

⁴⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p20; Swan, *The Power of Place*, p1

⁴⁷ Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p53

⁴⁸ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans by Cosman, pxviii

⁴⁹ Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p26

⁵⁰ Susan Birrell, *Sport as Ritual: Interpretation from Durkheim to Goffman*, *Social Forces*, Vol.60, No. 2, Special Issue, December 1981, p355 (Hereafter Birrell, *Sport as Ritual*)

One of Thorley & Gunn's criteria for sacredness - embellishment with man-made symbols - can be reflected in the symbolism of the standing stones and stone circle, creating a link to the evidence of sacredness of Neolithic and Bronze Age times. However, there appears to have been no conscious plan for this and perhaps this is further confirmation of a sense of innate sacredness within the site – an irruption of the sacred.⁵¹ As Eliade states “everything not directly consecrated by a *hierophany* becomes sacred because of its participation in a symbol which owe some of their symbolic significance to links with the cosmos”.⁵²

The stone circle in particular harks back to the widespread customs of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages where the site has its sacred past.⁵³ The symbolic message reflected within it, the armillary sphere, itself a model of the sky whilst centred on earth, and its inscription of man's struggle not only against the elements of sand, water and rock, but also against time, reflects Eliade's view on the existence of stone revealing to man the nature of an absolute existence beyond time, invulnerable to becoming; “before a thing exists, its particular time could not exist”, for every creation is regarded as having taken place “at the beginning of time”.⁵⁴ Ruggles identifies circles as possibly symbolizing “conceptual centres of the world”, reflecting the visible horizon, and a microcosm of the properties of the cosmos as a whole, whilst Eliade describes a circle of stones as “the most ancient of known forms of man-made sanctuary”.⁵⁵

The standing stones, symbolic of ancient standing stones, are the focus of an avenue of trees, suggesting a conscious symbolic orchestration of viewing the Castle, the home of the sacred monarch of Great Britain, on the horizon; it could be considered as a symbolic reminder of the ceremonial avenues of Stonehenge and Avebury.⁵⁶ Whilst Casey notes the strange power of the horizon to distinguish the dynamic basis of the gap between Heaven and Earth, the standing stones link symbolically with Eliade's concept of a cosmic pillar, a sacred pole or “axis mundi” where communication with heaven is possible.⁵⁷

The trees of the Arboretum link past and future. Many trees were donated in memory of family members leaving a symbolic ancestral memory, almost a revival of the site's place as a reminder of the dead. However, in Bender's view, tree-planting symbolically also honours the will for a future and rebirth, as did

⁵¹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p63

⁵² Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p446

⁵³ Ruggles, *Ancient Astronomy*, p99

⁵⁴ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp156 and 76

⁵⁵ Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p370; Ruggles, *Ancient Astronomy*, pp101-2

⁵⁶ Ruggles, *Ancient Astronomy* p101

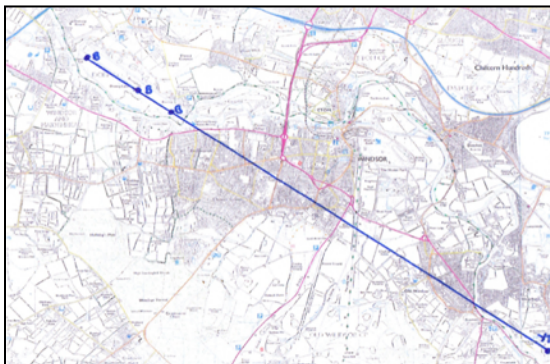
⁵⁷ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p37; Casey *The Fate of Place*, p11

the ceremonial burials in the water.⁵⁸ The tree in many cultures is symbolic of the World Tree or polar axis, rooted firmly in the earth whilst holding heaven in its branches.⁵⁹ Eliade also considers that trees manifest the power of the sacred and Swan cites groves of trees as being powerful enough to summon the presence of spirit.⁶⁰

The Tree of Light Project's website speaks of the imagery of the sacred Tree of Life created by God, thereby providing a further link from the essentially secular towards a more religious, sacred undertone.⁶¹ The poet acts as mediator between alternative worlds of discourse and encourages the children to consider that places are "storied places" that once belonged to others.⁶² Swan adds that sacred places are inspirational points for creativity, where heaven and earth have made it possible to gain access to the higher truth – "our unconscious voices call us to visit these special places even though we are not sure why".⁶³

Ley lines

Graves, along with Watkins and others who believe that the earth is "alive: living, breathing, pulsing", have concluded that the location of sacred sites was not chosen at random, considering that alignments or straight tracks, known as leys or ley lines, exist between ancient objects and sites.⁶⁴ From the plan of the rowing centre I noticed that the three main barrows align.



B = Barrow; YT (bottom right) = Ankerwycke Yew Tree

Through exploration of

⁵⁸ Bender, *Making Places Sacred* in Swan, *The Power of Place*, p329

⁵⁹ Geoffrey Cornelius and Paul Devereux, *The Secret Language of the Stars and Planets, A Visual Key to Celestial Mysteries*, Duncan Baird Publishers, 1996, p34

⁶⁰ Swan, *The Power of Place*, p15

⁶¹ <http://www.oxford.anglican.org/the-door/features/tree-of-light.html> , quoting Genesis 2:9 King James Version of the Bible

⁶² Swan, *The Power of Place*, p61; Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred, Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality, Expanded Edition*, The John Hopkins University Press, 2001, pp59-60 (Hereafter Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*)

⁶³ Swan, *The Power of Place*, pp2-8

⁶⁴ Tom Graves, *Needles of Stone Revisited*, Gothic Image Publications, 1986, p1; Alfred Watkins, *The Old Straight Track*, Abacus, 1974, pxx

the area, together with the ordnance survey map, I also found that the barrows aligned with an ancient yew tree – the Ankerwycke Tree – said to be 2000 years old, in the grounds of the ruins of the Ankerwycke Priory, in Wraysbury.⁶⁵ Some of the oldest trees in the Thames Valley are yew trees in churchyards and this one is clearly held in reverence as its nooks and crannies are crammed with pictures of deceased loved ones and notes with prayers for help.⁶⁶

Sacredness after the Olympics

Fletcher, in her studies of theatres as sacred spaces, identifies the great theatres of classical Greece as being open air, with performances unfolding under the rising and setting sun and audiences nestled in the earth.⁶⁷ Although not circular, as the ancient Greek theatres, there is a similarity of shape between the Rowing Lake and the ancient Hippodrome at Olympia where the chariot and horse races took place in the ancient Olympic Games.⁶⁸ Spectators would have sat around the edge on the embankments, in the same way as spectators view the rowing today. Fletcher describes ancient Greek theatre audiences as being held in a cosmic microcosm in the “womb of the earth” with “the vast heavenly arc up and over the playhouse bowl”.⁶⁹

The Rowing Lake now covers the burial mounds, symbolic of the mountain or the fixed point of the centre of the world, linking heaven and earth.⁷⁰ Above these barrows, symbolically, was the fixed point for the rowing section of the Olympic Games.

The Ancient Greeks, recognising the elusive quality of sacred space, had two words for space; *topos* or physicality of place, emphasised by Aristotle, and *chora*, which Plato regarded almost as an energy which fed place and people - “as

⁶⁵Ordnance Survey Explorer Map, No. 160, Windsor, Weybridge and Bracknell, Ordnance Survey, Southampton, 2009; http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-chl/w-countryside_environment/w-woodland/w-woodland-heritage_trees/w-woodland-heritage_trees-ankerwycke_yew.htm, accessed 5.12.2011

⁶⁶ http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-chl/w-countryside_environment/w-woodland/w-woodland-heritage_trees/w-woodland-heritage_trees-ankerwycke_yew.htm, accessed 5.12.2011

⁶⁷ Rachel Fletcher, *Ancient Theatres in Sacred Places*, in Swan, *The Power of Place*, p88 (Hereafter, Fletcher, *Ancient Theatres in Sacred Places*)

⁶⁸ Kl. Palaeologos, *The Olympic Games in Ancient Greece*, pp238-9

⁶⁹ Fletcher, *Ancient Theatres in Sacred Places*, pp104-5

⁷⁰ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p38

it were the nurse, of all Becoming".⁷¹ *Topos* might contain Eliade's considerations of innate sacredness and together with *chora*, according to Devereux, the more human construct of sacredness can be produced as place provokes our sense of spirituality through its generative energy.⁷² In Lane's opinion participation in deliberate ritual activity is what invariably occasions the transition from experiencing place as *topos* to encountering that same place as *chora*.⁷³ It is perhaps possible, therefore, that the energising force of *chora*, provided by the symbolic and ritual element of the Olympic Games, could bring a sense of sacredness to the site, thereby satisfying Durkheim's view of the human construct of sacredness.⁷⁴

Moreover, in Durkheim's opinion, "the sacred is contagious", in that for instance those who participate at a place considered sacred become themselves sacred characters.⁷⁵ The sportsman desires to be applauded and revered as a hero and represents Goffman's view of "the person in our urban secular world (who) is allotted a kind of sacredness" and is set apart from ordinary men as though he were supernatural.⁷⁶

At the time of the ancient Games spectators came from the remotest corners of the Greek world to offer sacrifices to the gods and heroes and to follow the games at Olympia.⁷⁷ Today spectators still flock to the Olympics - the pinnacle of achievement for all athletes - the prize they covet and revere; the spectators come perhaps as pilgrims just because it is the Olympics. Swan views ritualistic pilgrimages - the Olympic Games could be classified as such - as a form of recharging the earth with the love and reverence the pilgrims bring.⁷⁸ Furthermore, in Swan's opinion, the power of the sacred creates uniformity through time, particularly through rituals with such a powerful history of sacredness as the Olympics.⁷⁹ Both the ritual and the ceremony of the Olympics conform to Thorley and Gunn's functional requirement for sacredness.

⁷¹Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, p39; Aristotle *Physics*, 209a, in Max Jammer, *Concepts of Space*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969, pp17-21; Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. By R.G. Bury, Harvard University Press, 1929, 49a, p113

⁷²Devereux, *The Sacred Place*, pp 19-20

⁷³ Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred* p39

⁷⁴ Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, p39

⁷⁵ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans by Cosman, p xxii

⁷⁶ Birrell, *Sport as Ritual*, pp359 and 362

⁷⁷ Kl. Palaeologos, *The Organisation of the Games*, in *The Olympic Games in Ancient Greece*, p106

⁷⁸ Swan, *The Power of Place* p55

⁷⁹ Swan, *The Power of Place*, pp 55 and 146

Eliade states that festivals take place in sacred time and ritual scenarios mark cycles of time in some way.⁸⁰ It is perhaps interesting to note that the Olympic Games take place at traditional “harvest” time and the land on which the site is built has historically been used for arable farming; thus the symbolism of harvest is continued in the symbolic harvesting of the peak of athletic achievement.

The downside though is that a seven-foot high protective fence has been erected, dividing the landscape and the monuments and resulting in a change of “feel” or “spirit”. The site was also closed to the public for ten months in 2012.

Conclusion

As a ritual burial site in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, the current Eton Rowing Centre was sacred through the human action of ritual and possibly through its topographical features. Whether it can now be classed as sacred is subjective, but the evidence suggests that It conforms to both Eliade and Swan’s conjecture of innate sacredness as well as Durkheim’s argument that sacredness is humanly constructed. Even Durkheim admits that it is often impossible to distinguish between many secular and religious beliefs. The lake has been created by the efforts of man, but is naturally fed from underground water; the water, which itself holds its own primordial symbolism of sacredness, is innate to the land and could be regarded as a “hierophany” and sacred in Eliade’s terms; and man has constructed a new ritual on the water.

Whilst the trees are clearly a natural element of the landscape, they have been specifically planted by man, but are nourished from the underground water. As Eliade says, “the sacred tree, the sacred stone are not adored as stone or tree, they are worshipped precisely because they are hierophanies, because they show something that is no longer stone or tree but the sacred”.⁸¹

With regard to Thorley & Gunn’s criteria, the site is constructed over water, is revered by a culture of sport, and contains man-made symbolism as a link to the time when the land was sacred. This transforms the outwardly profane appearance – and will even more so with the added symbolism of the ancient traditions of the Olympic games. The stone of the monuments is a symbol for the centre of the world, the lake a symbolism of water as life and death and “forms”, and the tree links heaven and earth.⁸² The symbolism brings elements together; its sacredness is not synonymous with the sacrosanct as such, but is a more indigenous sacredness connected with the natural landscape, its stories and its

⁸⁰ Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p398

⁸¹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p12

⁸² Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* p53

rituals – past, present and future - all of which hold reminders of its ancient sacred past.

I suggest that the Eton Rowing Centre is an example of Devereux’ opinion that sacredness depends on an exchange taking place between location and the human mind and body.⁸³ As Swan argues, our bodies and minds hear the call of a place.⁸⁴ Man has created symbolic sacredness on the site. However, the location of that sacredness may have been a “calling” rather than a conscious decision.

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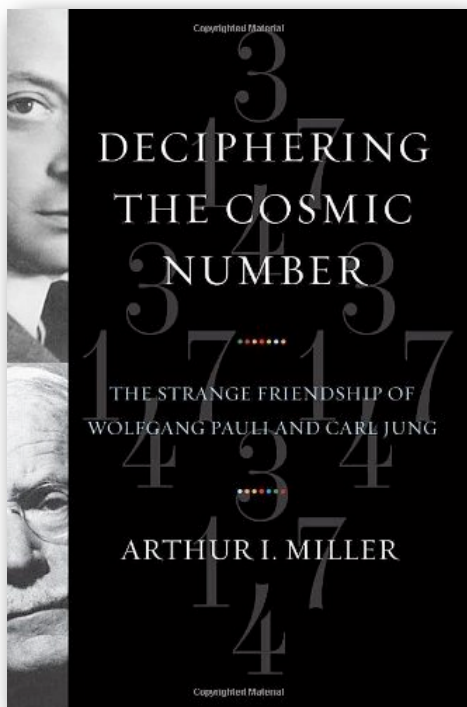
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Arthur Miller, *Deciphering the Cosmic Number: The Strange Friendship of Wolfgang Pauli and Carl Jung*, W. W. Norton & co. (2009)

Reviewed by Richard Harris

Arthur I. Miller's book is aimed at a general reading audience, but will be of particular interest to those familiar with the Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung (1875-1961); the German

physicist Wolfgang Pauli (1900-1958), the man Einstein called his successor; scientists and historians.

Miller undertakes a dual biography of two key early twentieth century thinkers, and attempts to describe their respective fields of study and capture the creative interaction between the two men that resulted in the collaboration of—among other things—a published book in which Jung wrote on the concept of, “Synchronicity,” and Pauli wrote on “The Influence of Archetypal Ideas on the Scientific Theories of Kepler.”

Miller, a professor emeritus of history and Philosophy of Science from University College London states that his “primary interest has always been in studying the creative process. The interaction between Jung and Pauli is a powerful example.” This book is a demonstration of that interest. The interest in the “creative process” is reflected in at least two of Miller's other works, one concerning *Picasso and Einstein*, and the other in his book, *Insights of Genius*.

The story told is essentially this: Before Pauli met Jung he was driven by the belief that mathematics could provide the ultimate answers to everything. After he met Jung he was

introduced to “non-rational” modes of thinking such as theory of personality types, alchemy, archetypes, and dream analysis. Those concepts allowed Pauli to think more creatively concerning issues of physics. Conversely, Jung looked to Pauli to provide him with a scientific basis for some of his psychological theories, particularly numbers as archetypes.

Miller’s treatment of the subjects’ biographies, summaries and contributions utilise extensive primary and secondary sources, including living authorities on Jung, Pauli and the Kaballah. The potentially complex mixture of quantum physics, alchemy, the prime number 137, Kabbalah, Jung’s theory of archetypes, Johannes Kepler, *The Book of Changes (I Ching)*, and dream analysis are expressed in readable language. Precision footnotes allow the reader to follow arguments and information, along with a selected bibliography. Those new to Jungian ideas, Pauli’s contributions to physics—including his “exclusion principle”—or issues in the history of quantum physics will find well documented explanations and summaries of those concepts. Miller’s goal to capture the story of the “creative process” between the two men was arguably successful.

Richard Harris is a student at University of Wales, Trinity Saint-David. He has an MA in Religious Studies from Seattle Pacific University and an MA in Counselling Psychology with emphasis in depth psychology, from Pacifica Graduate Institute. Richard currently works as a therapist in private practice.

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I look forward to hearing from you at

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Rod Suskin

Editor

An investigation into how counsellors/psychotherapists respond to clients who introduce astrological beliefs into therapy sessions.

by Ada Blair

This paper considers how counsellors/psychotherapists work with clients' astrological beliefs, taking into consideration the therapists training, therapeutic approach factor, and influence of therapists' own beliefs concerning astrology. It contributes to the debate regarding the place in therapy for clients' religious and/or quasi-religious beliefs including astrology. Methodology: Qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed. Questionnaires were given to twenty-one counsellors/psychotherapists from a range of therapeutic approaches working within Edinburgh and the Lothians. Interviews were conducted with four respondents. Results: nineteen questionnaires were returned with a majority professing some belief in astrology and the experience of clients introducing astrological belief into therapy. Training, orientation and therapists' beliefs about astrology were seen as influencing work with clients. Therapists with no belief in astrology recognised the importance of helping clients integrate body, mind and beliefs. Conclusion: The study suggests that the therapeutic approach may be related to how counsellors/psychotherapists work with clients' astrological beliefs.

Introduction

This is an investigation into how counsellors/psychotherapists respond to clients who introduce astrological beliefs into therapy sessions. As a counsellor/psychotherapist, with professional connections to the community of therapists and a strong personal interest in astrology, this study was undertaken from an "insider" perspective. The motivation behind this enquiry is my personal experiences of clients introducing astrological belief into therapy sessions and a curiosity as to whether other therapists shared these experiences.

Aim

The aim of this small, pilot research study is to consider ways in which counsellors/psychotherapists work with clients' disclosed astrological statements/beliefs within therapy sessions; to ascertain the extent to which their training and subsequent therapeutic approach factor in the interaction and the reported influence, if any, of their personal opinions/beliefs/experience concerning astrology.

For the purpose of this project astrology is considered to be a religious or quasi-religious belief; but in the eyes of many scientifically trained practitioners,

is seen as non-rational and/or non-justifiable. It is acknowledged however, that “religious” and “quasi-religious” are problematic terms as there is not general agreement as to what comprises a religion.¹ Additionally, as self-professed believers in astrology lack the shelter of an official church such as adherents of mainstream religions enjoy, they remain “alternative” and are subject to criticism from both sides of the rationalist/religious divide. Alison Bird—a believer—conducting academic ethnographic research among contemporary Western astrologers experienced: “Ridicule and disbelief ranging to horror that I should be attempting a serious anthropological study of a subject such as Western astrology.”²

Writing on best practice within psychiatry, an allied mental health profession, Harold G. Koenig suggests that the practitioner should, “always demonstrate respect for the patient’s religious or spiritual beliefs, being aware that they often hold the patient’s psyche together” and that “bizarre or even pathological beliefs” should be handled respectfully.³ I anticipate that my project will, in a small way, contribute to the debate regarding the place in therapy for clients’ declared religious and/or quasi-religious beliefs including astrology.

Numerous studies of psychiatrists in the UK, Canada and the US indicate widespread prejudice against religious belief and little integration of it into the assessment or care of patients.⁴ Recent research, however, indicates it can be a resource that may enable an individual to cope with the stress of illness, challenging life circumstances or a tool for personal development. In a survey of Association of Psychology Internship Centres’ training directors, 83% reported that discussions of religious and spiritual issues in training occurred rarely or never, and 100% indicated they had received no education or training in religious or spiritual issues during their formal internship.⁵ A national study of American Psychological Association member psychologists found that 85% reported rarely

¹ Charles F. Emmons and Jeff Sobal, “Paranormal Beliefs: Functional Alternatives to Mainstream Religion?,” *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 4 (1981).p.301

² Alison Gwendy Bird, “Astrology in education: an ethnography.” (DPhil diss., University of Sussex, 2006), p.236

³ Harold G. Koenig, “Religion and Mental Health: What Should Psychiatrists Do?,” *Psychiatric Bulletin* 32(2008).[hereafter Koenig, Religion],p.202

⁴ M. Baetz, Griffin, R., Bowen, R., et al “Spirituality and Psychiatry in Canada: Psychiatric Practice Compared with Patient Expectations,” *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 49(2004).pp.265-271

⁵ J. Lannert, “Resistance and Countertransference Issues with Spiritual and Religious Clients,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 31(1991).pp.68-76

or never having discussed religion and spiritual issues during their own training.⁶ Similar findings from other surveys suggest that this lack of training is the norm throughout the mental health professions, including counselling and psychotherapy.⁷ It is generally accepted that psychiatrists and other mental health professionals in Western societies are usually less religious than their clients and many regard religion as irrational, dependency-forming and of little use in today's society.⁸ In a recent information sheet however, one of the main professional membership organisations for counsellors and psychotherapists, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, suggests; "Spirituality, faith and religion might be included in both therapy and supervision training so that therapists and supervisors feel as competent to address these issues as they would any other."⁹

Methodology

The research methodology was to use short, paper questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This combination of research methods was employed as recommended by Alan Bryman; he stated that, "When quantitative and qualitative research are jointly pursued, much more complete accounts of social reality can ensue."¹⁰ Also, as a transpersonal therapist, I am interested in paying attention to my own internal process and to what William Braud calls, "the supporting atmosphere," "our ordinary and extraordinary personal experiences" and the additional information they may give, and he therefore advocates using an integral, pluralistic epistemology.¹¹ Speaking about the various forms reflexivity may take in social research, Charlotte Aull Davies also notes that reflexivity is, "not a single phenomenon but assumes a variety of forms and

⁶ E. Shafranske, & Maloney, H. , "Clinical Psychologists' Religious and Spiritual Orientations and Their Practice of Psychotherapy," *Psychotherapy*, no. 27 (1990).pp.72-78

⁷ R. Sansone, Khatain, K., & Rodenhauser, P., "The Role of Religion in Psychiatric Education: A National Survey," *Academic Psychiatry* 14(1990).pp.34-38

⁸ Simon Dein, "Working with Patients with Religious Beliefs," *Advances in psychiatric treatment* no. 10 (2004). [hereafter Dein, *Working*], p.287

⁹ Lynette Harborne, "Working with Issues of Spirituality, Faith or Religion" " in *BACP information sheet G13* (Lutterworth: BACP, 2008). P.4

¹⁰ Alan Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* (London: Routledge, 1992). P.126

¹¹ William Braud, "Integral Inquiry. Complementary Ways of Knowing, Being and Expression.," in *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences* ed. William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson (London: Sage, 1998). [hereafter Braud, *Integral*], p.62

affects the research process through all its stages.”¹² Journal keeping by the researcher is an activity at one end of the private/public spectrum; and during the course of the research I wrote in my journal: events, thoughts, feelings, observations, dreams, etc., that appeared to have some significance or relationship to the subject which helped widen my perspective as a researcher.

As manager of a counselling service I have ready access to a number of therapists; thirteen of the twenty-one questionnaires distributed were given to therapists working in this service, the remaining eight to colleagues working in other organisations or in private practice chosen to represent a variety of therapeutic approaches. Two weeks were given for questionnaires to be returned and nineteen were completed, a 90% response rate; subsequently, four face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted from amongst the therapists who, on the questionnaire, had indicated they were willing to be interviewed to further discuss the issues raised. The group of twenty-one therapists was selected because they had undergone professional, validated counselling/psychotherapy trainings which placed emphasis on active listening skills and a non-judgemental approach; I was interested in how these types of training may influence how therapists work with clients’ disclosed astrological statements/beliefs. None of the participants in this group advertised themselves as offering astrological counselling; and prior to this study, I was only aware of one of them having an active interest in astrology. Having been trained in, and continuing to work with, an eclectic range of therapeutic approaches and philosophical backgrounds; this group offered a wide basis for comparison in respect of their reactions to the professed astrological knowledge/belief of their clients. The group surveyed was small in number but I concur with Braud’s statement that, “If reality is holographic in nature, then the researcher expects to discover interesting principles even in small samples.”¹³ Judith Bell suggests that the interview, “can yield rich material and can often put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses.”¹⁴ In an effort to gain greater appreciation of the context and environment in which the therapists engage with their clients the interviews were conducted in the various therapy rooms used by the participants which ranged from an office in an urban higher education college to a rural, private therapy room. The interviews were not taped but I took anonymised, detailed notes and stated that I would ensure that any client information divulged when discussing

¹² Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography. A Guide to Researching Selves and Others* (London: Routledge, 1999). [hereafter Davies, *Reflexive*], p.6

¹³ Braud, *Integral*, p.56

¹⁴ Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project. A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education and Social Science*. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002). [hereafter Bell, *Research*], p.135

therapist/client interactions was reported in an anonymised manner and in line with ethical and professional guidelines.¹⁵ All interviewees completed an interview release form. Whilst the majority (fifteen) of those completing questionnaires agreed to be interviewed, practical considerations and our joint, limited availability determined which participants were interviewed. The interviewees chosen, three women and one man, do represent a range of theoretical orientations, length of time practising and practice settings. Two questionnaires were returned with no name yet both indicated they could be contacted for interview. Unfortunately there was no reliable way of contacting either of them.

The questionnaire was designed to be completed quickly and consisted of twelve questions requiring participants to tick their choices. Some required yes/no answers whilst others allowed for a range of opinion to be expressed. The questionnaire was designed partly on the basis of the surveys conducted by Bauer and Durant on belief in astrology.¹⁶ Blackmore and Seebold's questionnaire measuring the effect of horoscopes on women's relationships was also consulted.¹⁷ A stamped addressed envelope was included to encourage a return, as were my contact details to enable participants to ask questions about the research. A space was included at the end of the questionnaire for any comments. Questions were asked about therapists' theoretical orientation, length of time in practice, gender, age, knowledge of or belief in astrology, clients' introduction into therapy sessions of references to astrological beliefs, therapists' therapeutic approach; and if training, therapeutic approach and/or personal beliefs might factor in interactions with clients speaking about astrological beliefs.

As an insider both within the psychotherapeutic world and the astrological world, I am familiar with both astrological and psychotherapeutic language. I am a member of different "emic" subsystems as well as part of the "etic," external world.¹⁸ For this research study, in order to comment on these belief systems, I was aware of the need to adopt an outsider's view of both worlds, have an academic's voice, and become an insider within the system of commentary. As an insider I was mindful of the fact that my position may skew my informants' responses, particularly those of the therapists under my authority.

¹⁵ British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, *"Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy,"* (Luttersworth2010).

¹⁶ Martin Bauer and John Durant, "Belief in Astrology: A Social-Psychological Analysis," *Culture and cosmos* no. 1 (1997).p.55-70

¹⁷ Susan Blackmore and Marianne Seebold, "The Effect of Horoscopes on Women's Relationships," *Correlation* 19, no. 2 (2001).p. 17-32

¹⁸ Kenneth Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour*, 2 ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1979). pp.28-29

Offering anonymity was one way of addressing this (but in fact only three participants chose to remain anonymous). Bias, as Bell points out, is best addressed directly, "It is easier to acknowledge the fact that bias can creep in than to eliminate it altogether."¹⁹ However, I hoped to make use of my professional experience, at least to the extent that it will inform the questions I will ask. Charlotte Aull Davies notes that, "considerations of reflexivity are compelled to move beyond the notion of the researcher's effect on the data and begin to acknowledge the more active role of the researcher in the actual production of the data."²⁰

The four therapists were all individually interviewed in their own therapy rooms. All interviewees were informed that the interview would last for no more than forty-five minutes, and that the purpose of the interview was a more in-depth exploration of the extent to which they believed their therapeutic approach; as well as their personal opinions/beliefs/experience concerning astrology factored in the interaction with clients. I stated that I was particularly interested to hear of any instances of clients' introducing astrological beliefs into sessions and that my own interest in this area arose from my experiences with clients introducing astrology into sessions. In this sense the interviews were semi-structured but within this I adopted a minimally directive, flexible approach, allowing the interviewees to pursue their own train of thought within the topic area. Very occasionally I did interrupt if I felt they were digressing too far but I tried to ensure they had the freedom to move into areas they felt to be important. Bell suggests that if the researcher's views on the subject are strong, caution should be exercised as to how the questions are phrased to avoid "leading" the interview.²¹ However, the extracts quoted here focused only on what was said that is related to the research topic. All interviewees signed an interview release form.

None of the participants were aware of my interest in astrology prior to receiving the questionnaire and, as a feminist and someone interested in Ann Oakey's work on ways of subverting traditional, hierarchical interviewing techniques; I wanted to adopt a more person-centred approach and to share my personal attitudes to, and ways of working with astrological beliefs being brought into sessions.²² John Cresswell notes that, "ideological perspectives often guide such studies, drawn broadly from postmodern concerns."²³ From this viewpoint,

¹⁹ Bell, *Research*, p.139

²⁰ Davies, *Reflexive*, p.8

²¹ Bell, *Research*, pp 139-140

²² Ann Oakey, "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms," in *Doing Feminist Research*, ed. H. Roberts (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).p.30-61

²³ John W. Cresswell, "Philosophical and Theoretical Frameworks," in *Qualitative Enquiry and Research Design* (London Sage, 1998). P.88

I was interested in bringing to the attention of therapists a marginalised group of clients who are self-professed believers in astrology.

Discussion

Fifteen women and four men returned questionnaires. The majority, 68% had been practising for more than eleven years and 95% were aged forty-one or over.

Question 1 relating to therapists’ theoretical orientation yielded the following information in Table 1.

Table 1. Counsellor/psychotherapist theoretical orientation (number of responses in brackets)

- 1. a. Psychodynamic (1)
 - b. Person-centred (8)
 - c. Humanistic (3)
 - d. Integrative (8)
 - e. Other - Transpersonal (3), Psychosynthesis (1), Jungian (1)
- (4 respondents ticked more than one category)

Person-centred, transpersonal and psychosynthesis are all considered to be humanistic approaches, therefore at least fifteen respondents can be said to be offering an approach where the emphasis is on the client's capacities for choice, responsibility and achieving one’s potential; and which strives to move away from the medical model of traditional psychology. Whereas, Jungian psychotherapy, based on the work of Carl Jung, is a psychodynamic approach, which is interested in unconscious thought processes and how they manifest themselves in a client's thoughts and behaviour. By exploring these patterns it aims to increase a client's understanding of how the past has influenced present thoughts and behaviours.²⁴ Jung was very interested in astrology and it features widely in his writings, “the aeon of fishes is drawing to its end and is at the same time the twelfth house of the zodiac.”²⁵ The respondent who stated “Jungian” also ticked “humanistic.” It might be assumed therefore that most, if not all of these therapists, might be accepting of “alternative” beliefs such as astrology. It is not possible to specifically say what integration of approaches are used by the eight therapists who ticked “integrative;” but one such respondent’s comment indicates an interest in Jung: “I was introduced to C. G. Jung through the work of

²⁴ United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy. http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/iqs/dbitemid.639/sfa.view/different_types_of_psychotherapy.html.

²⁵ Carl Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, ed. Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler Sir Herbert Read, trans. R.F.C. Hull, 2nd ed., vol. 9, C.G. Jung. *The Collected Works* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975). [hereafter Jung, *Archetypes*], p.210

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psychoanalyst/astrologer Liz Greene. This constellated the beginning of a rich journey of discovery and the unfolding of my path toward the world of psychotherapy.”

Responses to the questions relating to knowledge of, or belief in astrology are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Belief in astrology (number of responses in brackets)

- 5. Have you ever read a teach- yourself astrology book or taken an astrology course?
 - a. Yes (5)
 - b. No (12)
- 6. How much do you believe in astrology?
 - a. A lot (5)
 - b. A little (11)
 - c. Not at all (1)
 - d. Don't know (2)
- 10. Which of the following statements best describes what you think astrology is?
 - a. It's a science (0)
 - b. It's a means of predicting the future (0)
 - c. It's a system of belief (11)
 - d. It's a form of divination (3)
 - e. It's a personal development tool (4)
 - f. I have no opinion as to what astrology is (0)
 - g. Other, please specify (5) –‘It's a creative art’, ‘It's a model for personality; making meaning and reflecting on our relationships with nature, others and god’, ‘An interest in positions/movements, etc of stars, planets, sun and moon’, ‘It's an old wisdom or science’, ‘We are planetary people in a wider universe’

84% of respondents therefore professed some belief in astrology with 26% of those expressing strong belief. The figures from Gallup polls for belief in astrology, based on direct questions, are generally between 20% and 29% therefore this figure is substantially higher.²⁶ As Nicholas Campion points out however, “The quantification of belief is widely understood to be highly problematic, and there are substantial problems with both the collection and interpretation of

²⁶ George Gallup, “The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1999,” (Wilmington, Delaware: 2000).

statistical data concerning religious affiliation, practice and attitude.”²⁷ 58% of respondents saw astrology as a “system of belief” which echoes Stephen’s Hunt’s view that astrology is often regarded as a matter of belief. ²⁸

Two questions related to clients’ introduction into therapy sessions of astrological belief and responses are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Clients’ introduction into therapy sessions of astrological belief (number of responses in brackets)

- 7. During a therapy session has a client ever spoken about their star sign ('sun sign') e.g. 'I'm a Virgo'?
- a. Yes (17)
- b. No (2)
- 8. During a therapy session has a client ever spoken in more detail about their astrological beliefs e.g. 'I'm a water sign and my partner is earth', 'I've had two accidents this week, I wonder what's going on with Mars'?
- a. Yes (8)
- b. No (11)

89% of respondents had worked with clients who had introduced some element of astrological belief, awareness of sun sign, into therapy sessions. Of the 42% of respondents who had had clients bring in a more detailed narrative regarding astrological belief, four said they believed in astrology “a lot,” and four “a little.”

Simon Dein suggested that, “Patients with religious beliefs may bring up religious ideas and images in therapy;” ²⁹ it appears to also be the case with astrological belief. Jung’s famous case study of a patient in the process of individuation contains much astrological imagery, “A notable innovation is the appearance of two crabs in the lower, chthonic hemisphere that also represents the body. The crab has essentially the same meaning as the astrological sign Cancer.”³⁰ It may be the case that therapists with some belief or interest in astrology may be more “alert” to astrology being introduced into a session. Responses to the two questions relating to how the therapists’ therapeutic approach and personal beliefs might factor in interactions with clients speaking about astrological beliefs are shown in Table 4.

²⁷ Nicholas Campion, “Prophecy, Cosmology and New Age Movements: The extent and nature of contemporary belief in astrology” (PhD diss., University of the West of England, 2006), p.214

²⁸ Stephen J. Hunt, *Alternative Religions: A Sociological Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).p.173

²⁹Dein, *Working*, p.292

³⁰ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 342

Table 4. Therapists’ therapeutic approach and personal beliefs

9. To what extent might your training and subsequent therapeutic approach factor in interactions with clients speaking about astrological beliefs?
- a. A lot (9)
 - b. A little (6)
 - c. Not at all (1)
 - d. Unsure (3)
11. To what extent do your personal beliefs/opinions/experience concerning astrology factor in interactions between yourself and clients?
- a. A lot (3)
 - b. A little (5)
 - c. Not at all (5)
 - d. Unsure (6)

The 79% of respondents who felt their training and approach impacted on how they interacted with clients were evenly spread across all the orientations. Of the 42% of respondents however who believed their personal beliefs/opinions/experience factored in interactions, only one was person-centred in approach. This may be due to this approach’s strong emphasis on the need for the therapist to fully accept the client without assumptions or prejudices.³¹ The 26% of respondents who appear to believe personal beliefs/opinions/experience do not factor are also spread evenly across all orientations. 79% of therapists in this study therefore believe their training and subsequent therapeutic approach factor in interactions with clients speaking about astrological beliefs; 42% believe their personal beliefs/experience/opinions factors in such an interaction and 32% were unsure. In addition, 37% of therapists believed both their training and therapeutic approach, as well as their personal beliefs/experience/opinions were factors. As well as considering the impacts, if any, of training/therapeutic approach and personal beliefs; these questions are also indirectly looking at the gap between respondents’ private and public belief systems. It may be the case that belief in astrology may have no relation to what therapists do with such beliefs in therapy sessions but I was aware of a bias towards the opposite view and, as David Silverman suggests, researchers can only hope to be aware of their personal bias, “as most scientists and philosophers are agreed, the facts we find in ‘the field’ never speak for themselves but are impregnated by our assumptions.” ³²

³¹ Carl R. Rogers, “The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change,” *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, no. 21 (1957).pp.95-103

³² David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk,Text and Interaction* (London: Sage publications, 2002).p.1

As this was a pilot study done within a limited timeframe, there was little opportunity to trial the questionnaire. The wording of questions and the options offered as answers in any questionnaire are crucial to the final conclusion and there appeared to be some difficulties with the wording of certain questions for one respondent, "Wasn't sure what was meant by Q.8, as a person-centred counsellor I'd want to understand what their beliefs meant for the client (whatever the belief). Similarly not sure how to answer Q.10."

One respondent commented that the questionnaire had prompted him to, "reflect more on my beliefs vis-à-vis astrology, whether, perhaps I might have a tendency to trivialise it." Several respondents commented that they found the topic, "really interesting," "fascinating" and "an area I've never thought about before."

The four therapists interviewed came from a diverse range of personal and professional backgrounds, but all had an openness and interest in alternative belief systems: anthroposophy, Eastern spirituality, yoga, etc.; and in the words of interviewee 2, "a distrust of the prevailing belief in science." All had previous experience of clients bringing astrological narrative into therapy sessions.

A number of common themes arose from the interviews. All interviewees referred to the importance of settings in influencing how and what clients brought into therapy sessions. Interviewee 1 commented, "In the context in which I work clients use clinical constructs to describe their distress." Interviewee 4, who practiced in London in the 1980s and had connections to peace camps and a variety of "alternative" lifestyles, commented that clients there brought astrology into sessions much more often than her current clients in Scotland do, "It was to do with a particular time." Interviewee 2 felt that practicing in an art college she was much more likely to meet clients who were interested in astrology, "Well, you know, it's an art college, you'd expect interest in the non-mainstream."

The therapist's personal appearance was also felt to be relevant by interviewee 3, "Feedback I got was that they thought she looks and dresses a bit wacky, I can talk about this (astrology) to her." This caused me to reflect in my journal of my own experience of meeting a person-centred counsellor who habitually wore a large crucifix and the inhibitory effect this had on me in discussing anything non-mainstream."

Interviewees 2 and 3 respectively, commented on the clients' likelihood of reflecting on astrological beliefs and working with them in sessions when it was "allowed" by the therapist, "My disclosure (of own sun sign) probably impacted positively on the therapeutic alliance;" "A client who was a bit OCD – she brought in she was a Virgo. I acknowledged I understood what she meant, and we were able to talk about that." It was also felt that certain therapeutic

orientations were more open to a wider range of belief systems, including astrology, than others. Interviewee 4 stated that, "Psychosynthesis attracts astrologers. Working from a transpersonal orientation, astrology, alchemy, the tarot, it's all ok;" and interviewee 1 declared: "A person-centred counsellor wouldn't ever boot a client out who talked about believing in astrology."

The gender of the client was also seen as relevant in terms of what was brought into therapy. Interviewee 1 thought that, "A man in counselling might be scared to admit to reading his horoscope whilst women are much more likely to talk about their spirituality and beliefs." Interviewee 2 concurred with my own experience that, "It's overwhelmingly female students who have spoken about belief in astrology."

All interviewees spoke of the importance of helping clients integrate body, mind and beliefs, whatever those beliefs might be, and interviewee 4 said, "I'd be looking at helping them integrate and incorporate all their parts of self, including an astrological self, if that was a part they saw as significant." For interviewee 3, a practicing astrologer, there had been anxiety related to "coming out" as a therapist who is open to astrology: "I thought it could be seen as crossing a boundary line, I might get my wrists slapped, something to do with being worried about not being seen as a professional. On my website why have I not put astrology as something I could work with?" This echoes Ellen Wagenfeld-Heintz's research findings when she states that although the majority of her study participants believed that rational medical-scientific and religious paradigms were of similar importance, and may co-exist or even be integrated in therapeutic practice, "these integration initiatives were found to face powerful institutional impediments such as politico-cultural norms of separation of religion from secular institutions and professional norms."³³ Interviewee 2 perceived the topic as highlighting a diversity and equality issue, "Some people are scared of bringing it (astrology) to therapy, I know I was worried about him treating me as a weirdo. I was used to people looking down their noses." Synchronistically, on the same day as I interviewed this therapist I attended a training course on diversity and experienced first hand the negative reactions of several participants when one participant (a therapist) disclosed she was also an astrologer.

All interviewees believed strongly that any introduction of astrology into therapy should come from the client—not the therapist—but all would work with, in the words of interviewee 4, "whatever material the client brings, but I'd be looking at how they use it rather than the thing (astrology) itself." Interviewee

³³ Ellen Wagenfeld-Heintz, "One Mind or Two? How Psychiatrists and Psychologists Reconcile Faith and Science," *Journal of Religion and Health* 47, no. 3 (2008). [hereafter Wagenfeld-Heintz, *Mind*], p.338

I spoke of the “danger” in working with clients who have “rigid beliefs in astrology” and who may, “blindly follow their astrological chart,” but declared, “I’d find that challenging but I’d do it.” This echoes Koenig’s statement that even if a client’s beliefs are considered by the therapist to be strange or even pathological, they should still be respected.³⁴

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to consider ways in which counsellors/ psychotherapists work with clients’ disclosed astrological statements/beliefs within therapy sessions: to ascertain the extent to which their training and subsequent therapeutic approach factor in the interaction and the reported influence—if any—of their personal opinions/beliefs/experience concerning astrology. It appears that within the target group in this particular community of therapists, there is a high percentage of therapists (84%) with some belief in astrology. Future study would be required to further explore the reasons for this. There is also a high percentage (89%) who have worked with clients who have brought astrological narrative into therapy sessions. A majority (79%) of respondents, spread across all the orientations, felt their training and approach impacted on how they interacted with clients introducing astrological narrative into therapy, and 42% of respondents believed their personal beliefs/opinions/experience factored in such interactions. No one particular therapeutic orientation appeared more accepting of astrology being introduced into therapy by clients than any other. The 26% of respondents who believe personal beliefs/opinions/experience do not factor are also spread evenly across all orientations. It may be the case that therapists with some belief or interest in astrology may be more “alert” to astrology being introduced into a session.

This was a small pilot study and a consequence of taking such a small sample is that small variations in the number of responses can result in substantial variations in percentage results. In addition, the chosen methodology and terminology used affects any conclusions that can be drawn from it. On reflection I would perhaps choose to word certain questions differently; “integrative” was too non-specific a term and length of time practicing seems irrelevant. As Dein suggests, “Incorporation of religious themes into psychotherapy with religious patients may lead to enhanced efficacy,”³⁵ there may be a similar case for incorporation of astrological themes. This would involve therapists being willing, as Wagenfeld-Heinz suggests, to confront the “powerful institutional impediments.”³⁶ In Koenig’s view, just as psychiatrists need to consider what

³⁴ Koenig, *Religion*, p.202

³⁵ Dein, *Working*, p.293

³⁶ Wagenfeld-Heintz, *Mind*, p.338

religion means to them personally as, “Religion is relevant to British psychiatrists because many of their patients will be religious;”³⁷ the place in therapy for clients’ declared religious and/or quasi-religious beliefs—including astrology—also needs further consideration. The experiences of clients themselves in therapy who are “believers” in astrology is yet another area that merits further study.

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Appendix

Interviewee 1 is a male, person-centred counsellor
 Interviewee 2 is a female, person-centred counsellor
 Interviewee 3 is a female, integrative counsellor
 Interviewee 4 is a female, integrative counsellor

Superstitions about celestial phenomena and their perceived effect on luck.

by Rod Suskin

A research project was undertaken to investigate belief in sky omens and ‘superstitions’ across a randomly selected set of individuals and the extent to which they attribute the influence of such omens in their lives. A questionnaire was given to a random selection of middle-class, 21st-century residents of Cape Town, South Africa, containing lists of superstitions taken from encyclopaedias, dictionaries and earlier studies and which could be viewed as true, partially true or untrue. Some were also interviewed. Respondents were asked about their behaviour in response to celestial phenomena, with a focus on questions about wishing and about perception of ‘luck’. Most respondents did not believe superstitious behaviour to be effective, although most practised such behaviour nevertheless. Results supported theories about the social importance of superstition, childhood influences, beliefs about ‘attunement’ and Wiseman’s work on luck, which suggests it is a result of intentional, pro-active behaviour.

A review of previous work on superstition shows that research has tended to concentrate on the beliefs of specific groups (e.g. women¹ or students²) or areas (e.g. a geographical state³) rather than on specific types of superstition. These studies involve the collection of beliefs, with an attempt to explain why members of such groups or regions defined in the research hold the beliefs.

The main problem affecting research into superstition lies in the difficulty in defining what superstitions are. Since superstition is often the term used to describe the beliefs of pre-literate cultures studied in anthropology, it must be noted that this research focuses on superstitious beliefs in contemporary western society.

¹ Gillian Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women, Folklore and the Supernatural Today* (London: Penguin, 1987).

² Edmund S. Conklin, “Superstitious Belief and Practice among College Students,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 30, no. 1 (1919).

³ Lelah Allison, “Folk Beliefs Collected in Southeastern Illinois,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 63, no. 249 (1950).

Alexander Lesser considers superstitions to be survivors of earlier belief systems in which they had a context.⁴ He uses the example of the Pawnee people whose beliefs about snakes biting people who mention coyotes in summer refers to the visibility of specific stars and constellations in the sky at different times of the year. In the minds of the Pawnee “the belief is not a superstition. It involves reasoned thinking, orderly inference in terms of the Pawnee view of nature and the universe.”⁵

Alan Dundes argues that collectors of superstitions rarely categorise them, allowing anything to be defined within their domain.⁶ This makes it difficult to research the subject of superstition beyond mere collection. Many of the studies cited here and examined in the survey of previous work on superstition showed this to be true.

Dundes states that in early research superstition frequently refers to other people’s beliefs or beliefs that are not part of Christianity, Judaism or Islam. He points out that later definitions classify superstitions as beliefs that are irrational, or based on fear or taboo, while many are predicated on the criterion that superstitions are beliefs that have no objective validity in the scientific sense. This raises a number of problems, notably that scientific truth is actually relative historically and culturally, and also that the results of scientific practises are not necessarily due to the science itself – for example, the placebo effect.⁷

Dundes cites scholars that have argued for a definition which concentrates on the form the belief or practice takes rather than where it comes from or what the actual belief is. The most important idea arising from this approach is that superstitions offer two avenues to people dealing with challenging environmental conditions: the need to control outcomes or to be able to predict them.

This view is echoed by Lesser: since signs and omens are by definition beyond control, the interpretation and use of them affords people control over them and over the environment. He identifies superstitions as beliefs which are isolated from any larger belief system having a rationale – “a belief or practice which is isolated from a system of reference.”⁸

Dundes’ definition is that “superstitions are traditional expressions of one or more conditions and one or more results with some of the conditions signs and

⁴ Alexander Lesser, “Superstition,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 28, no. 23 (1931).

⁵ Lesser, “Superstition,” p. 627.

⁶ Alan Dundes, “Brown County Superstitions: The Structure of Superstition,” *Midwest Folklore* 11, no. 1 (1961).

⁷ Dundes, “Brown County Superstitions: The Structure of Superstition,” p. 27.

⁸ Lesser, “Superstition,” p. 620.

other causes.”⁹ He categorises them according to whether they are uncontrollable signs, or magical acts like divination or ritual.

Edward Conklin asserts that superstitions are frequently held by adolescents and college-students.¹⁰ He found that an overall 82% of respondents held or had previously held superstitious beliefs.¹¹ He asked students to report the source of their beliefs and found that most (47%) cited social reasons and 22% learned the belief from their elders. About 15% of them acquired them as social practices while another 15% reported an intuitive or spiritual type of reason.

Beckwith argues that superstitions in educated cultures are a form of play that functions as social interaction and participation as well as a connection to past traditions.¹² Not only are they isolated from earlier beliefs, they have even become isolated from being any kind of “belief” at all.

However, Bennett asserts that believers in “folk religion” number a substantial minority that shows no sign of abatement.¹³ Citing two previous studies showing up to 30% of the population as holding such beliefs, she states “it would seem from their results that quite a substantial proportion of the population, of all ages and social classes, share these ancient traditions.”¹⁴

Evidence that these beliefs are actually held rather than merely practised as a tradition lies in Bennett’s research into women’s beliefs which showed “very large numbers” of her respondents believing in some form of foreknowledge.¹⁵ She argues that the fact that counter-arguments to foreknowledge exist is proof that it is an active belief system. Nevertheless, she still agrees that “individuals adapt traditional ideas to their own values and needs.”¹⁶

The vast majority of superstitions about celestial phenomena deal with the increasing of good or bad luck. Despite the social and traditional reasons offered as the contemporary motivation for superstitious behaviour, the need to influence luck may remain a strong motivator for such behaviour. Richard Wiseman asserts that “luck exerts a dramatic influence in our lives.”¹⁷ Defining luck as the effect of chance events in our lives, he nevertheless demonstrates that there are those who

⁹ Dundes, “Brown County Superstitions: The Structure of Superstition,” p. 28.

¹⁰ Conklin, “Superstitious Belief and Practice among College Students.”

¹¹ Conklin, “Superstitious Belief and Practice among College Students,” p. 87.

¹² Martha Warren Beckwith, “Signs and Superstitions Collected from American College Girls,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 36, no. 139 (1923).

¹³ Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women, Folklore and the Supernatural Today*.

¹⁴ Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women, Folklore and the Supernatural Today*, p. 25.

¹⁵ Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women, Folklore and the Supernatural Today*, p. 122.

¹⁶ Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women, Folklore and the Supernatural Today*, p. 130.

¹⁷ Richard Wiseman, *The Luck Factor* (London: Arrow Books, 2004), p. 11.

repeatedly benefit from good luck and those who repeatedly suffer through bad luck.

Wiseman’s research shows that people who describe themselves as unlucky believe in luck-related superstitions and rely on their effect more than twice as often as those who don’t believe in superstitions.¹⁸ On the contrary, people who describe themselves as lucky (and who appear to have an unusual number of lucky chance events in their lives) generally engage in pro-active behaviours to influence their luck. These are: noticing and acting on opportunities, acting on hunches and intuitions, maintaining positive expectations about future opportunities, and responding to unlucky experiences by taking a positive approach and taking steps to change the outcome or prevent a similar outcome in the future. In addition, he finds that lucky people tend to be open to new experiences, create networks of opportunities and take a relaxed attitude to life. He also found that lucky people frequently use meditation or contemplation to improve their intuition or return to a problem later and asserts that luck can be improved through the deliberate application of these behaviours.¹⁹

No previous research that examined the category of celestial phenomena in isolation could be located, although all of the collections included them in their findings.

In this paper, the selection of beliefs or practices which are in response to celestial phenomena allows for the examination of the extent to which people believe outcomes are affected by the sky, for whatever reason they deem. Furthermore, the outcome is specified as “luck,” which is by far the most common outcome intended in the variety of superstitions surveyed here and which will allow for investigation of the issues of belief and of influencing luck, which tends to be ignored by collectors and those who assert social and traditional reasons for behaviour.

Methodology

A questionnaire was designed to survey whether respondents practise or believe superstitions that are derived from visible celestial phenomena, namely the appearance of stars and meteorites (shooting stars), the moon, the sun, rainbows and the weather.

Respondents were asked to indicate their knowledge of or belief in a variety of common beliefs generally regarded as superstitions about these celestial phenomena. These beliefs were culled from earlier papers as well as from a

¹⁸ Wiseman, *The Luck Factor*, p. 155.

¹⁹ Wiseman, *The Luck Factor*.

dictionary²⁰ and an encyclopaedia²¹ of categorised superstitions. They were able to select whether a belief was not true, occasionally true, sometimes true or always true, or to indicate that they did not know the belief or whether it was true. They were also offered the opportunity to list beliefs or practices that were not mentioned in the questionnaire.

In addition, specific questions were asked as to whether respondents made wishes when they observed celestial phenomena and whether they believed these wishes had had an effect on their lives or behaviour. Most of the questions focused on the simple principle of whether ‘luck’ was affected by these practices. Space was provided for people to elaborate.

It was initially planned to approach random individuals in a popular recreational area of Cape Town. Unseasonal heatwaves during the weekend of questionnaire distribution led to the park being unusually empty. The questionnaire was then made accessible on the ‘Surveymonkey’ website and invitations to complete it were sent to 78 people randomly selected by a computer from a list of 2,046 email addresses of acquaintances of the researcher. Respondents were free to share the website address of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire also made provision for people to indicate willingness to undergo a personal follow-up interview via Skype or telephone. Five respondents were selected for follow-up interviews in order to sample the reasons for the different types of responses shown above. Thus, the interviewees were classified as: one total non-believer (responded negatively to all questions); one who responded to signs although she did not believe them; two who believed them although they produced no results; and finally one who believed that they did produce results.

The results were collected using collating tools provided on the Surveymonkey website. For clarity, all levels of ‘true’ answers were summed to identify all people who thought the beliefs were at all true.

Results

There were 73 respondents to the survey, 62 of whom completed all the questions. Fifty-three of the respondents indicated a willingness to be interviewed.

The findings show that a large proportion of people acknowledged at least some behaviour or superstitious response to celestial phenomena. The most common practise was to respond to the appearance of a shooting star by making a

²⁰ Iona Opie and Moira Tatem, *A Dictionary of Superstitions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
²¹ E. Radford and M. A. Radford, *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions*, ed. Christina Hole (London: Hutchinson, 1961).

wish. Although 54 people have wished on stars, only 18 believed the wish came true and another 28 that such a wish might have come true. This is similar to the number of people who answered ‘yes’ or ‘maybe’ when asked if the sky, stars, moon or sun influence luck (47).

However, when asked whether the listed superstitions about stars improving luck are true, only 33 people indicated that they believed wishing on them produced luck while an additional two people thought that merely seeing them was enough to increase luck.

Respondents were asked whether they believed that they had ever gained an advantage, knew what was going to happen or were forewarned of disaster by signs in the sky. Forty-three said they had or might have, with only nineteen reporting that they never had.

While 16 people indicated they did not believe that the sky influences luck in any way, only half of those said they had never actually made a wish on a star or rainbow. However, when presented with a list of 24 common superstitions just three respondents indicated that they believed none of them and had never practised them.

The following table summarises the results of questions asked directly about celestial superstitions and luck. The percentages are derived from the total number who answered that question. A complete summary of results, including responses to the individual superstitions listed, can be found in Appendix A.

Table 1: Summary of responses to questions

Question about celestial phenomena practised as a superstition / influencing luck	Yes	No	Maybe/ Don't know
Has wished on stars/shooting stars/rainbows	54 (85.7%)	8 (12.7%)	1 (1.6%)
Believes such a wish came true	18 (28.6%)	17 (27%)	28 (44.4%)
Believes celestial phenomena influence luck	29 (46%)	16 (25.4%)	18 (28.6%)
Believes superstitious practices based on sky signs have influenced luck	16 (25.8%)	25 (40.3%)	21 (33.9%)
Believes superstitious practices based on sky signs have successfully forewarned of disaster	8 (12.9%)	40 (64.5%)	14 (22.6%)
Has stopped a course of action because of one of these signs	11 (17.7%)	45 (72.6%)	6 (9.7%)

Successfully anticipated or predicted something due to such a sign	16 (25.8%)	41 (66.1%)	5 (8.1%)
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Discussion

Many earlier findings were confirmed. The number of people who indicate that they practise wishing on stars irrespective of whether they are true or not (54 respondents or 85.7%) is similar to Conklin’s finding that 82% of respondents indicated that they do or have in the past practised superstitions.²² Only 33 respondents (52.4%) indicated belief in this superstition. The conclusion may be drawn that superstitious practice is not necessarily a function of control, prophecy or belief systems, but may also be related to habits, behaviours learned in childhood, nostalgia for childhood or something else.

More than half of the superstitions that were known or believed were related to shooting stars. In addition, beliefs about the full moon causing madness or affecting growth were much more common than beliefs related to luck; and beliefs that rainbows or rain on sunny days foreshadowed good fortune were well known. Other superstitions, by comparison, had far fewer believers. This, and the high number of respondents indicating that they did not know a superstition, shows that traditional superstitions about the sky are on the decline. Considering Lesser’s theory of superstitions as isolated beliefs or based on a specific rationale, it is likely that weakening of superstitious beliefs is related to either the ascendancy of mainstream belief systems or the decline of belief systems in general and the dominance of scientific rationalism.

From the space offered for comments it emerged that although the wish appears to come true frequently, there may be other reasons why they come true. These results seemed to closely follow what Gillian Bennett experienced in her research, that belief can be strong while other possibilities are accepted.²³

The respondents offered a variety of explanations for their superstitious behaviours or beliefs that was similar to those suggested in the earlier papers. Those that professed belief in the outcome of these wishes usually believed there was a spiritual source of any success rather than as a result of ‘wishing’ alone. Some respondents mentioned God, Goddess or angels as the reason, while interviewee Catherine suggested that it may be due to wishes acting like prayers, or for some other reason she didn’t understand.

Catherine stated that there were three distinct occasions when wishing on a star came true. She shared one of these:

²² Conklin, “Superstitious Belief and Practice among College Students.”
²³ Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women, Folklore and the Supernatural Today*.

Catherine: Larry said goodbye to me when I left, and I knew he had malaria at the time. Then, I went back to Cape Town and he just never called. He disappeared. People told me that he had left, he wouldn't call me. I kept having terrible dreams about him being in hospital. Then I saw a shooting star and wished for him to call. Two days later, he did. He had been in a coma with the malaria. That's why he didn't call. But he woke up after the wish.

When Catherine was asked how she knew the wish was responsible, she said that although she didn't believe in God, she still prayed because "these things are unknown so maybe they do have an effect."

Interviewer: Who received the wish?

Catherine: Prayers or wishing are talking internally to an outer being that you hope is bigger than you.

Hayley thought that wishes worked because they invoked a form of magic: "I would call it magic at some level. Nature is presenting itself to me. And I take that opportunity." She added that she would "certainly have a wish ready" should she see a shooting star that night, and that if her young son were present she would say to him, "Listen, this is the time to make the wish, you could do it now." This confirmed her very strong belief in a magical system, especially since she believed wishes came true "a good 80% of the time."

Hayley had admitted in her questionnaire that omens had never helped her avoid disasters or be forewarned. When asked why she thought this was, she said "if I knew more of what these lores...were then I would heed them," suggesting that it was her failure to observe the correct signs that was at fault.

Both these believers are examples of the definition types that earlier collectors of superstitions had attempted. Catherine showed evidence of a belief that was isolated from any known system, while Hayley saw celestial signs as part of a much bigger magical system of which she was ignorant, but which would allow for a large amount of both prophecy and control if known.

It is also evident from the results that a large number of people engage in superstitious practices even though they may not believe them. Both interviewees who indicated this said that the beliefs were something they learned in childhood and the practice of superstitions is a remnant of childish behaviour, or is attached to memories of childhood or parents and so continue out of habit.

Martha explained this in her questionnaire response: "I don't believe in any of these things. I only really enjoy seeing the first star at night, a shooting star, a rainbow, etc. I am sure my enjoyment is due to the remnants of the superstitions that still hung around in America when I was born."

Abby, in an interview, explained that the superstitions came from her mother or childhood servants, but that they strengthened her relationship with the sky.

Abby: I have an innate response to the sky ...I am very moon driven – I feel the pull of the moon. I never know whether it's an intuitive response to nature or if I just made it important to me. I look for the sky every night.

She defined her response to celestial events as “an active response to nature, not just a passive one” and added that superstitions were a way of “attuning yourself to nature.”

The notion of these superstitions as traditional practices that connect them with their ancestors is very clear in both interviewees and questionnaire explanations of why they believed them.

Ronnie admitted to knowing and practising many superstitions despite not believing in any of them, and understood the strongly ingrained reasons for doing so:

Ronnie: I grew up in a community that was filled with fear and the need of divine intervention (*his parents were European Jews during the World War II period.*) My parents were traditional [but] secular .. they still had lots of thoughts and sayings that they got from their parents who were traditional. In a way I was fed that, almost in a religious way, that there are things like ‘if you do this then that’s going to happen.’ My parents came from Europe ... all of a sudden their whole worlds were turned upside down. When they came to Israel, they couldn’t let go of the fear and the sense of ‘how come I survived and all my family is gone?’ This looks so quiet, all of a sudden something will come and burst the bubble and we will be killed.

According to Ronnie, the superstitious practices were necessary to control this uncertain future and often aroused fear in him as a child. When asked why he continued to practise them if this was the case, he said that the traditions were important. “They brought all the rich European culture with them, of how we stand with respect to nature, and why bad things happen to good people.”

Yet Ronnie refused to teach these beliefs to his own children, stating that he didn’t want to create any fears for them by making them think there were “forces” around them, but rather “I will expose them to the bigger beauty of the universe without necessarily the causal, almost religious aspect...I’m not comfortable with causality. It is not help or intervention, it’s the bigger picture which includes nature and the universe.”

A variety of other responses were offered in the questionnaire which suggested that people believed they were merely ways of connecting with nature or acknowledging it, but not related to anything spiritual.

There were only three responses which indicated total disbelief in all superstitions and celestial effects, one of whom, Sam, admitted to having wished on stars “as a reflex action, like a tradition.”

In an interview, Sam described himself as “rational and atheistic,” and saw superstitions as “things to appease the gods” that were necessary in prehistoric

times. He also thought he was subject to some inner part of himself that wanted to connect to that ancient way of doing things. "I have a sculpted cat that faces the driveway. I like it because it makes me feel safer. It makes me feel like I've acted on the wish to feel safer. [Wishing is] like that. I mean, even though technically it's a meaningless gesture."

With respect to producing luck from the wish, Sam said, "I don't give any credence to good luck, bad luck."

Interviewer: So you don't consider yourself lucky if you don't believe in luck?

Sam: Well, I'd consider myself fortunate... many terrible things that could have happened to me, didn't happen to me. But luck implies that something other than the random is at work.

Interviewer: Do you believe people can improve their luck?

Sam: Well they can improve their behaviour. By not driving drunk you improve your luck of not getting arrested.

A number of respondents also equated their superstitious practice and the positive results of wishing with deliberate attunement to natural cycles. Some equated this with astrology, or argued that superstitions about the sky were a simpler form of astrology and therefore they were not irrational. This indicated an assumption on behalf of these respondents that astrology was some form of sky observation other than those defined in the questionnaire as superstition, and may also be evidence of response effects, particularly the deference effect, occurring "when informants tell you what they think you want to know, in order not to offend you."²⁴

Comments in the responses showed that many respondents were aware the researcher is an astrologer and assumed that the research was about astrology. In response to the question as to whether other sky superstitions were known, one wrote "I am a textbook example of a Cancerian", one went into technical detail about astrological events in her personal horoscope, and another simply wrote "astrology." Given that this assumption existed, other comments in the final question requesting comments can be understood in the light of the deference problem: "Sorry...seems like I'm a bit of a party pooper on this one," "the bigger question [is] belief in the influence of the stars...it's mainly Rod Suskin that makes me interested in that." Catherine, in her interview, stated, "I thought I wasn't being helpful because there weren't enough 'yeses' in my answers. I felt ignorant – I do feel like I am a spiritual person. I tried to be honest but I thought you would think I was an idiot." This may imply that some respondents gave

²⁴ H. Russel Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology*, Second ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994), p. 231.

more positive answers than they would have had they not known of the researcher.

Despite these answers, the large proportion of people who practise some form of sky-related superstition, despite a considerably smaller percentage actually believing that they get results related to luck, coupled with the responses discussing some form of deliberate attunement to something seems to indicate the importance of Wiseman’s findings about lucky people and the capacity to improve luck through deliberate behaviours and attitudes. Furthermore, this attunement is more frequently achieved through stars or shooting stars than other celestial phenomena. In her comment, Mary wrote:

When I really enjoy these things I experience my life as ‘lucky.’ Luck just means feeling positive and drawing positive experiences. Luck isn’t a separate force. I don’t believe in luck. I do believe that when something brings you joy like a rainbow or a shooting star, you open your heart and many possibilities are then possible.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Ronnie when he explained why he continued the superstitious behaviours inherited from his parents even though he knew their origin and meaning.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to discover the extent to which sky superstitions were practised and the extent to which people attributed the influence of these in their lives. Previous work found or postulated reasons based on social activity, the need to control and the need to predict. The answers given by respondents in this paper indicate that such reasons still exist, and tradition and upbringing play an important part in developing them.

It is also apparent that the practice of superstitious behaviour is frequently a method used to increase a sense of attunement to nature in order to increase luck, similar to methods found by Wiseman. Superstitious behaviour in response to sky omens can be seen as a positive approach to the environment with the expectation that positive results will follow. It is worth noting that, given that many respondents’ beliefs that these practices allow the alignment of their intention with nature, these practices may still be defined in terms of the rational relationship with how they view the world described by Lesser, and thus are not necessarily isolated from a larger belief framework.

Rather than the traditional passive or ritualistic approach which may relate to earlier views, and the belief that observation and wishing are sufficient to influence luck, this research reveals the possibility that superstitious behaviour in response to celestial phenomena today is frequently a form of a pro-active,

intention-based effort to benefit from awareness of and connection to the natural environment and to modify behaviour to effect a more beneficial outcome.

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Appendix: Questionnaire and Responses

1. What is your age?

Under 18	2.7%
19-25	5.5%
26-35	8.2%
36-45	34.2%
46-55	38.4%
56 or over	11.0%

2. What is your gender?

Female	58.9%
Male	41.1%

3. Are you prepared to be interviewed if I feel your answers to the survey can help me further with this research?

Yes	72.6%
No	27.4%

4. If you are willing to be interviewed, please provide contact details. All data will be kept confidential and your name will not be released to anyone without your permission.

5. Have you ever made a wish when seeing a star, shooting star, rainbow or other sign in the sky?

Yes	85.7%
No	12.7%
I don't remember	1.6%

6. Do you believe such a wish ever came true?

Yes	28.6%
No	27.0%
Maybe	44.4%

7. Do you believe the sky, sun, moon or stars influence your luck in any way?

Yes	46.0%
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7. Do you believe the sky, sun, moon or stars influence your luck in any way?

No25.4%

Maybe28.6%

8. The following are some common beliefs about the meanings of different signs in the sky. Please rate to what extent you think or experience these to be true.

	Not true at all	Occasionally true	Usually true	Always true	I don't know	Total all true
When you wish on a shooting star the wish will come true.	34.9% (22)	36.5% (23)	11.1% (7)	4.8% (3)	12.7% (8)	52.4% (33)
Seeing a shooting star means you will be lucky.	36.5% (23)	25.4% (16)	17.5% (11)	12.7% (8)	7.9% (5)	55.5% (35)
Counting stars brings bad luck.	82.5% (52)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	17.5% (11)	0% (0)
Pointing at stars brings bad luck.	84.1% (53)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	15.9% (10)	0% (0)
Pointing at the moon brings bad luck.	82.5% (52)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	17.5% (11)	0% (0)
Turning the coins in your pocket during full moon will bring luck.	69.8% (44)	0.0% (0)	3.2% (2)	1.6% (1)	25.4% (16)	4.7% (3)
Wishing on the first star at night brings good luck.	46.0% (29)	22.2% (14)	14.3% (9)	3.2% (2)	14.3% (9)	39.7% (25)
Seeing a rainbow brings good luck.	46.0% (29)	19.0% (12)	15.9% (10)	11.1% (7)	7.9% (5)	41.3% (29)
Cutting hair at the new or full moon affects the growth of the hair.	41.3% (26)	7.9% (5)	11.1% (7)	9.5% (6)	30.2% (19)	28.6% (18)
Warts can be cured by rubbing them in direct moonlight.	61.9% (39)	12.7% (8)	4.8% (3)	1.6% (1)	19.0% (12)	19% (12)
The full moon can cause symptoms of madness.	31.7% (20)	28.6% (18)	17.5% (11)	9.5% (6)	12.7% (8)	55.5% (35)

8. The following are some common beliefs about the meanings of different signs in the sky. Please rate to what extent you think or experience these to be true.

Wishes on the new moon will come true.	50.8% (32)	19.0% (12)	6.3% (4)	3.2% (2)	20.6% (13)	28.6% (18)
Moving home at new moon brings luck.	44.4% (28)	9.5% (6)	12.7% (8)	3.2% (2)	30.2% (19)	25.4% (16)
New moon on a Saturday brings bad luck.	79.4% (50)	1.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	19.0% (12)	1.6% (1)
Full moon on a Sunday brings bad luck.	76.2% (48)	1.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	22.2% (14)	1.6% (1)
Pointing at the sun is unlucky.	82.5% (52)	0.0% (0)	1.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	15.9% (10)	1.6% (1)
Being born at sunrise brings good luck.	52.4% (33)	11.1% (7)	3.2% (2)	4.8% (3)	28.6% (18)	19% (12)
It is good luck for the sun to shine on a bride.	52.4% (33)	12.7% (8)	7.9% (5)	3.2% (2)	23.8% (15)	25.4% (16)
Being outdoors during an eclipse brings bad luck.	77.8% (49)	3.2% (2)	1.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	17.5% (11)	4.6% (3)
Rain while the sun shines brings good luck.	52.4% (33)	17.5% (11)	9.5% (6)	7.9% (5)	12.7% (8)	34.9% (22)
Red sky at night brings good weather	27.0% (17)	14.3% (9)	20.6% (13)	4.8% (3)	33.3% (21)	23.8% (15)
Red sky in the morning brings bad weather.	27.0% (17)	12.7% (8)	19.0% (12)	3.2% (2)	38.1% (24)	34.9% (22)
The second full moon in a month is lucky.	49.2% (31)	3.2% (2)	9.5% (6)	7.9% (5)	30.2% (19)	22.2% (14)
The second full moon in a month brings bad weather.	52.4% (33)	4.8% (3)	1.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	41.3% (26)	6.3% (4)

If you have a belief or practise involving the sky, weather, rainbow, sun, moon or stars that is not listed above please mention it here:

9. Do you believe you have ever experienced any advantage or luck due to observing one of these signs in the sky?	
Yes	25.8%
No	40.3%
Maybe	33.9%

10. Do you believe you ever avoided a problem or disaster because of being forewarned by one of these signs?	
Yes	12.9%
No	64.5%
Maybe	22.6%

11. Have you ever successfully anticipated or predicted something because of one of these signs in the sky?	
Yes	25.8%
No	66.1%
Maybe	8.1%

12. Have you ever stopped a course of action because of one of these signs?	
Yes	17.7%
No	72.6%
Maybe	9.7%

Celestial Magic

Eleventh Annual Conference of the
Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Saturday 22 - Sunday 23 June 2013

[Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute](#)

16-19 Queen Square, Bath BA1 2HN, UK

Conference theme: Magic, loosely defined, is the attempt to engage with the world through the imagination or psyche, in order to obtain some form of knowledge, benefit or advantage. Celestial magic engages with the cosmos through stellar, planetary or celestial symbolism, influences or intelligences. This academic conference will explore the history, philosophy and practice of astral magic.

For more information on speakers and the programme, and to book, visit <http://www.historyofastrology.org.uk/conferences/CelestialMagic/index.html>

SPICA Volume I Number 2 will be published on 21 September 2013

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If you are interested in reporting on the summer school and conference please contact the editor