Christians and the sky

The role of folkloric pre-Islamic anwâ’ in Islamic Arabia

Contemporary Jewish pilgrimage in Jerusalem:
Is the Western Wall an Eliadean axis mundi?

Western astrology and the question of predestination
Is the Western Wall an Eliadean axis mundi? - An exploration into contemporary Jewish pilgrimage in Jerusalem

David Rubin
PAGE 4

Predestination and negotiation in Western astrology

LeeAnn Curtis
PAGE 19

Christians and the sky

Kevin Marley
PAGE 29

The role of folkloric pre-Islamic anwā’ in Islamic Arabia

Mai Lootah
PAGE 43

THE COVER shows the Western Wall in 1870 (photographer unknown, in the public domain)
With this issue, Spica enters its fourth year of publishing high quality student work, and to celebrate we’ve refreshed our look. Spica is a work in progress and we plan to keep improving the reading experience – look out for our first “special” edition in Autumn.

This issue is also a testament to the diversity and significance of the academic contribution by our students. With the three major religions of the world as well as astrology represented in one issue, the range and relevance of their work is well represented. David Rubin contextualises Mircea Eliade’s axis mundi in a contemporary Jewish context of visiting the ‘Western Wall’ in Jerusalem, Kevin Marley examines how Christians incorporate attitudes about the sky into their religious views, and Mai Lootah explores how some Muslims in Saudi Arabia today incorporate ancient folklore about the sky into their beliefs. Finally astrology, a core research area of cultural studies at the Sophia Centre, is tackled by LeeAnn Curtis in a study of predestination and negotiation.

I am sure you will enjoy the fascinating sweep of topics in this issue and how they address traditional issues in a modern context.

Rod Suskin
Is the Western Wall an Eliadean axis mundi? - An exploration into contemporary Jewish pilgrimage in Jerusalem

by David Rubin

Mircea Eliade sees hierophany (manifestation of a higher being) as consecrating profane space, transforming and revealing it as the centre of the homo religiosus’ world, an axis mundi. This paper examines the sacredness of the Western Wall in Jerusalem in the light of its hierophany, and asks whether the Wall serves today as an Eliadean axis mundi, implying a unique, temporal transferal of sacrality from the Temple Mount, through human agency. This research is based on literature on the concepts of religion and sacrality and a phenomenological approach, based on fieldwork as a participant observer of the behavior and religiosity at the Wall. The sacrality of the Western Wall was found to be defined by its boundaries and physical effects; its experience, (including sacrality manifested through human agency,) though ‘saturated with being’, could not be said to be so significant as to present the concentrated reality of an axis mundi. The Wall’s sacred space, bound to the Temple (Mount), was found to resonate with a feeling of yearning, the sacredness of God in exile.

The entire world can be seen in the eye... The white is the ocean; the red in the white is the dry land interspersed with water. The iris in the centre is Jerusalem, the centre of the world. The centermost point of the eye, the pupil through which the eye sees, is Zion, in which the whole world can be seen. (Zohar)†

Introduction

The aim of this research is to examine the nature of the sacredness of the Western Wall through the ritual and religiosity expressed and the experience felt at the Wall.


The entire world can be seen in the eye... The white is the ocean; the red in the white is the dry land interspersed with water. The iris in the centre is Jerusalem, the centre of the world. The centermost point of the eye, the pupil through which the eye sees, is Zion, in which the whole world can be seen. (Zohar)†

Introduction

The aim of this research is to examine the nature of the sacredness of the Western Wall through the ritual and religiosity expressed and the experience felt at the Wall.

Also known as ‘the Wailing Wall’, the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Israel, attains its religious significance through its adjacency to the holiest place in Judaism, the Temple Mount. Nonetheless, notwithstanding its genealogy, the Western Wall is often erroneously seen and referred to as the holiest place in Judaism (today), since, according to rabbinic law, it is forbidden for Jews to enter the original vicinity of the Temple, due to the present absence of ritual purity. Accordingly, based on the research’s findings, this paper will debate whether the Western Wall has taken the place of the Temple Mount as a modern-day axis mundi (in the Eliadean sense) and thereby consider whether sacred space is a human construct.

To do that, this paper will assess the manifestation of sacrality at the Wall in the light of David Émile Durkheim’s theory of sociality generating the notion of ‘sacred’, Mircea Eliade’s theory of the divinity and ‘existential value’ of sacred space, Baruch Bokser’s notion of ‘mobile “temporary sacrality”’, Catherine Bell and also Richard Cornstock’s approach to ritual and behaviour defining sacredness, Rudolph Otto’s notion of sacredness as an inner experience, and various other thinkers’ philosophies. These will be viewed against the backdrop of the Temple Mount and Western Wall’s long history.

The fieldwork is based on Abraham Joshua Heschel’s and Christopher Tilley’s theories of phenomenology and Charlotte Aull Davies’ methodology of participant observation, which provide the grounds for a phenomenological

---


viewpoint on the Wall and a view of the sacred through observation of ritualistic behaviour.⁴

The methodology used will be both a literary-based historical and cultural enquiry, and a phenomenological and self-reflexive approach based on fieldwork at the Western Wall as a participant observer on visits to the Wall over a fortnight period at various times of religious significance, recording personal experiences and observing the modes of religious expression of the Wall’s visitors.

The literature that has informed this research is wide-ranging, touching on a number of areas, including the extensive literature devoted to the study of religion and its notion of sacrality. Thus, this research draws on Rudolf Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy*, Eliade’s *The Sacred and the Profane*, Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, as well as F. M. Loewenborg’s study, *Where Jerusalem Jews Worship*, Bokser’s *Approaching Sacred Space*, Bell’s *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* and Comstock’s *A Behavioural Approach to the Sacred*.

As a result of my findings, this essay seeks to discuss how sacrality may be artificially created. It will also address various levels of sacredness, the nature of the *axis mundi* and whether such a notion exists ‘in exile’. The essay will thus critically analyse the possibility of the Western Wall as an Eliadean *Axis Mundi*, by taking into account its historical and cultural significance and the religious behaviour, ritual and atmosphere experienced at the Wall.

**Academic rationale**

The study of pilgrimage and experience of sacrality at the Western Wall presents a unique opportunity to delve into the human psyche and its different reactions based on presupposed ideologies presenting diverse notions of sacrality. Moreover, it enables a hands-on analysis of the effects of an Eliadean *axis mundi*, if it should prove to be so.

Hence, the purpose of this research, particularly through the fieldwork, is to attempt to assess the various nuances of experience of the sacred, vis-à-vis

---

the theories regarding it; as Timothy Insoll writes, ‘the same landscape can mean different things to different people’.  

These theories include Eliade’s notion of sacredness generating a sense of being and his idea of hierophany as defining sacred space; moreover, his concept of the Jerusalem Temple as the axis mundi of the Jewish People is central to the uniqueness of this project, in view of the role the Temple plays in the collective religious consciousness of the Jewish People in its Platonic form and its assumed future return.  

This evolution of importance of the Temple Mount, subsequently transferred in part to the Western Wall, is unique. This paper will seek to ascertain whether its sacrality preceded subsequent advances in the development of the Judaic religion or whether it was its result, in the light of Durkheim’s definition of religion through the projection of a notion of sacredness.  

Jonathan Z. Smith’s suggestion that ‘there is nothing that is inherently sacred or profane’ but sacredness is created through the ‘attention focused on it, in a highly marked way’ – and also, the theory held by Durkheim and Smith, that sacredness is not intrinsic but a phenomenological reality – will be viewed as opposed to the Talmud’s notion of the Temple site’s intrinsic sacredness.  

Eliade saw sacredness, although necessarily experienced and therefore phenomenological, nonetheless more intrinsic than Durkheim or Smith’s viewpoint.  

The particular ritual action peculiar to the Western Wall will be observed in the light of Bell’s emphasis on ritual action as creating sacred space, Ronald L. Grimes’ understanding of ritual behaviour and religious performance as

---

7 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, pp. 37, 47, 182.
9 Eliade, *The History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, xiii
creating a *locus* of ritual practice and Comstock’s use of behaviour in defining the boundaries of the sacred space.  

Bell has defined ritualization as ‘a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities’, ‘the strategic production of expedient schemes that structure an environment in such a way that the environment appears to be the source of the schemes and their values’ and ‘the medium chosen to invoke those ordered relationships that are thought to obtain between human beings in the here-and-now and non-immediate sources of power, authority, and value’.  

Furthermore, the fieldwork provides ample opportunity for assessing Otto’s theory of the ‘numinous’, and the various emotions he describes in association with ‘the holy’.  

Though both Durkheim and Eliade present sacredness as essential to all religions, since Eliade saw it as generating a sense of being, even using the Jerusalem Temple as an example of *axis mundi* for the Jewish people, the fieldwork will also attempt to ascertain if there is a different ‘sense of being’ at the Wall, and thereby to assess if that sense of *axis mundi* is still present in the modern mind.

**Literature review**

Though ritual theorists have long argued that ritual action creates sacred space, Eliade’s theory of the importance of hierophany creating an *axis mundi* enables a consideration of the site over and beyond any ritual behaviour involved.

---


In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade discusses *hierophany*, (the manifestation of a higher being) as consecrating a profane, chaotic space and transforming it into a sacred, cosmic space. According to Eliade, a hierophany marks a space as holy, an ‘orientation in the chaos of homogeneity’, revealing that point as the centre of the world where contact with divinity is possible. This connection of the earth to the heaven (and underworld) is referred to as the *axis mundi*. It is advantageous for the religious person to settle near his *axis mundi* as it represents ‘a superabundance of reality’.\(^{14}\)

The Hebrew term (for sacred), *qadosh*, generally translated as ‘holy’, is defined by the rabbis as separated and ascribed to a higher purpose.\(^{15}\) This ‘separation’ can be divinely orchestrated, as in Eliade’s hierophany, or ‘artificially’ sanctified, by man, as in Durkheim’s definition of ‘sacred things’, as ‘things set apart and forbidden’.\(^{16}\)

However, according to the Talmud, in order for the sacrality to have permanent affect, it must involve human action and intent.\(^{17}\) Such a sanctity was operational in Solomon’s Temple.\(^{18}\) Moreover, its series of exclusions and separations, according to Eliade, become transitional borders between the religious and the secular, as he writes, ‘the threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier’, a symbol and vehicle of passage from the one type of world to the other.\(^{19}\)

Though that intent was operational with regards to Solomon’s Temple, it had no direct bearing on the Western Wall. Nonetheless, the fact that the Western Wall is still standing, is seen by many as a theophany, as the Midrash reports that God swore that the Western Wall would never be destroyed.\(^{20}\)

---

16 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, p. 129.
17 Babylonian Talmud, *Chagigoh*, (Vilna, 1835), p. 3b.
18 Babylonian Talmud, *Chagigoh*, (Vilna, 1835), p. 3b.
Moreover, according to Durkheim, sanctity spreads: ‘Once items of a clan, considered sacred, are stored in a specific location, neighbouring trees and rocks appear sacred’.\(^{21}\) Thus, the sacrality inherent in the Temple Mount can be seen as ‘referred’ to the surrounding walls.

Whereas Eliade understood the ‘non-homogeneity’ of space to manifest through ‘the experience of an opposition’, Smith proposed that attention focused in a particular way on certain objects, that marks them out from other kinds of object creates the notion of sacrality.\(^{22}\)

The importance of a ‘ritual environment’ is stressed by Bell and Grimes. Although Grimes has not developed a systematic approach to the study and interpretation of the spatial aspect of ritual performances, the notion of ritual space as ‘the locus of ritual practice’ constitutes one of the angles from which ritual enactments can be viewed.\(^{23}\)

Bell traces the relationship between ritual and place to Arnold van Gennep’s work on rites of passage.\(^{24}\) According to Bell, Van Gennep, ‘alerted scholars to the ways in which ritual can actually define what is sacred, not simply react to the sacred as something already and for always fixed’.\(^{25}\) For them, the sacred is created by human activity. Furthermore, rituals can create levels in sacrality, distinctions that effectively divide one space from another.

However, according to Eliade, in sacred space, defined by the hierophany or *axis mundi*, reality is experienced with greater clarity, characteristically unique, significant and special, whereas profane space consists of every other space.\(^{26}\) Thus, though appreciating that the nature and quality of sacrality is

---

See, for example [http://www.mpaths.com/2016/02/prayers-go-to-heaven.html](http://www.mpaths.com/2016/02/prayers-go-to-heaven.html) [acc. 2nd Jan. 2016]


enhanced and perpetuated by ritual and human observance, it is primarily the sacrality that encourages ritual.\textsuperscript{27}

Additionally, Eliade argues that doors and thresholds are the symbolic markers that bridge the gaps between the sacred and profane space.\textsuperscript{28} Symbols and mechanisms of passage, these points act not only as barriers and boundaries but also as channels of communication between the two realms.\textsuperscript{29}

**Methodology**

The methodology used will be a literary-based historical and cultural enquiry, plus a phenomenological approach, based on fieldwork at the Western Wall as a participant observer on visits to the Wall over a fortnight period at different times of religious significance, (i.e. day and night, weekday and Sabbath, early morning and early afternoon, evening and midnight) recording a personal diary of own observations, feelings and experiences, observing regulars and visitors, locals and tourists, Jews and presumed non-Jews, religious and non-religious, of various ethnic backgrounds, whilst engaging in various modes of customary religious expression, thus also enabling a personal self-reflexive approach. Several photos will also help convey the set-out.

This self-reflexive methodology is based on Charlotte Aull Davies’ work on participant observation. ‘Reflexivity’, writes Davies is ‘a process of self-reference’, the researcher’s motives an important source of research problems and theoretical perspectives.\textsuperscript{30}

**Reflexive Considerations**

The praying area of the Western Wall is divided into a men’s section and a women’s section. It should be noted that my observations generally involved the men’s section.

Moreover, as I am an orthodox Jew from birth, the fieldwork and phenomenological observations (as a religious believing observer) will be duly

\textsuperscript{27} See Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, pp.30-31, for an example of ritual use and enhancement.

\textsuperscript{28} Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 25.


coloured. The fact that I am ‘middle-aged’ may also have an effect on the degree of emotional observance or detachment from the place.

Moreover, a practitioner of religious ritual amongst similar practitioners, per-force becomes a part of the unity of the field of ritual, affected and affecting his surroundings. The observations are thus inevitably determined by my participation and position – literally and metaphorically – at the site. However, as Davies observes, the sharing of religion, ethnicity, sex, or class, does not guarantee mutual understanding.31

**Field work and Discussion**

My visits to the Western Wall were spread over a fortnight, including prolonged visits on the Jewish Sabbath. Hazards of being too observational in the light of police security issues was averted by my blending in with the surrounding Jewish orthodoxy in appearance and behaviour. I was therefore able to discern the pilgrimage, religious ritual and behaviour of a wide variety of individuals over almost all of the twenty-four hours of the weekday, and over a significant part of the Sabbath.

I will start my account with a description of the layout, then a description of those who frequent the Wall, their ritual and behaviour during the week, and finally with a self-reflexive account of my own feelings at the Wall.

The Western Wall is preceded by a large paved plaza (fig. 1). The plaza has an off-centre partition in order to accommodate men and women according to the Halakha of a synagogue. A further part of the Western Wall is accessible through a tunnel-like edifice, under an arch known as ‘Wilson’s Arch’ (fig. 2). This too has a private, (white) curtained area for women.

The visitors to the Wall consisted of six categories: Jewish ultra-orthodox, Jewish modern orthodox, Jewish ‘traditional’ secular, Jewish secular, non-Jewish orthodox and non-Jewish secular. These can be further divided into ‘regulars’ and non-regular ‘visitors’. The Jewish orthodox can also be further divided towards those who sympathetic to the modern state of Israel and those who oppose it (for religious, idealistic reasons).

Despite the fact that the non-Jewish visitors might be further categorised according to religion, belief and level of belief, as I did not conduct an interview I was unable to ascertain this. I have therefore grouped them together, as logic dictates.

The regulars, for the most part, were either Jewish ultra-orthodox or Jewish orthodox. These were besides the handful of charity collectors who appear to have ‘fixed’ places on the way to the Western Wall plaza. Young soldiers, either secular or religious, are frequent visitors. There is also a constant flow of tourists during the day, Jewish and non-Jewish, often taking pictures of the Wall and its surrounds. This generally presents a dichotomy of sacred and the profane.

Of the orthodox, some participate in the prayers of the day. Others say Psalms, private prayers and might also study religious texts. It should be noted that according to the Halakha, it is preferable to pray the obligatory prayer.
[called the amidoh, the ‘standing prayer’] in an enclosed area. Thus, there are those who are particular not to pray any of the main prayers outside, in the Western Wall Plaza. Should they wish to pray any of the three daily prayers, they do so in the tunnelled area of Wilson’s Arch.

The less religious will take a kippah (skullcap) at the stand. He will wonder awkwardly to the Wall and rest his hands on the stones, often staying there for several minutes in private prayer. Others, perhaps with a more religious background, may take a prayer-book or book of Psalms and pray from it.

There are those who insert a kvittel in the crevices between the large stones, often accompanied by a still, whispered prayer (fig. 3). Amid the prayers, tears are spilt, sometimes copious, sometimes a mere reddening of the eyes.

![Figure 3 - A visitor placing a 'kvittel' in the Wall.](image)

The atmosphere at night differs strongly to that of the day and a weekday is different from the Sabbath. During the week, it is only in the early hours of the morning, around two o’clock, that the Wall becomes quieter; perhaps ten men can still be found praying outside or moving around, and another ten inside the tunnelled enclosure. From about three-thirty, the area starts filling up gradually, with prayers starting an hour before sunrise and the plaza gradually filling.

At the moment of sunrise, everyone turns quiet, as the amidoh [still, standing prayer] is said. The Morning Prayers are now being said by various quorums and they continue till mid-morning. At these times, there are so many groups and individuals praying, that finding a still corner is difficult. Nonetheless, it is always relatively easy to find a space by the Wall, except for on the festivals.

---

32 Babylonian Talmud, Berachoth, (Vilna, 1835), p. 34b; Shulchan Aruch, 90:5; Eshel Avraham (Butshatsh), ad loc.
On the Sabbath, the area is packed. The mood is jubilant and festive, and the prayers are conducted in song or cantorial style, according to the prayer-leader’s ability.

On leaving the plaza, the custom is to step backwards, slightly bowing as one walks out.

Feelings: Standing from afar, there is subtle sense of awe. As one enters into the plaza’s precincts, there is a noticeable change in mood. The huge stones create their own ethereal effect. Approaching the stones, there is a feeling of coming home, of belonging. It is different from the feeling in a synagogue.

The prayer is one of yearning and longing, as well as a feeling of closeness to the Shekhinah [Divine Presence]. Closing one’s eyes at night, one feels privy to a Presence, a numen. However, the stillness and depth of the experience is marred by the almost constant activity at the Wall. There is little in the way of order and decorum: each person may do as he sees fitting, some even saying out quite loudly their prayers and Psalms.

Being by the Wall, there is a feeling of seclusion and oneness with G-d. Praying any place within the Plaza, might be compared to praying near the Holy Ark in a synagogue; the love, awe, the feeling of closeness to the Unknowable One, is practically palpable.

This feeling of closeness is closest to that described by Otto, as feeling one’s own consciousness yet simultaneous experiencing the self as nothing, being nothing in the presence of that which is all.33 There is also the element of Eliade’s 'the sacred is saturated with being’.34 This feeling starts on entering the precincts.

(Interestingly, there is a somewhat oppressive feeling the Wilson’s Arch section but this may be as a result of the incessant noise coming from the air-conditioners.)

---

Final Thoughts

In a city sacred to three religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (or Mohammedanism), a city of the world’s best religious history for three thousand years, a city where millions turn their thoughts with reverence and adoration, the Western Wall is one of the central ‘attractions’, attracting the interest of a large number of people from all walks of life every day. It is therefore not surprising that religious feelings are encountered at the Wall.

Though the feelings experienced at the Wall were similar to those when entering a synagogue, the intensity was much greater. The ritual – the placing of kvittelach (prayers in note-form) in the Wall, the constant praying – does not, to my mind, create the atmosphere; it is a result of it. As Bell writes, ‘this second pattern describes ritual as type of functional or structural mechanism to reintegrate the thought-action dichotomy, which may appear in the guise of a distinction between belief and behaviour or any number of other homologous pairs’.35

---

35 Bell, Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice, p. 20.
However, it will be recalled that these feelings started on entry to the vicinity. Evidently, as proposed by Grimes, it is the demarcation of the area that precipitates the emotions. Moreover, the hierophany inherent in the Temple Mount, and the theophany inherent in the Western Wall, no longer create the Eliadean axis mundi for the modern Jew. In its place, there is a feeling of yearning for what is missing, for the Western Wall’s sacrality is a poor remnant of that which was. Simon Goldhill expressed this well, saying,

The space of [the Temple's] absence has attracted the hopes and aspirations of millions of people over the centuries, and continues to fuel the most intense feelings in the Middle East and beyond. . . .The Temple, lost and reconstructed, yearned for and mourned for, pictured and sung about, is above all else a monument of the imagination.36

Indeed, the sacrality of the Western Wall appears in part artificial. While there are records of Jewish religious activity on the Temple Mount, as late as the thirteenth century, when the Italian Jew, Obadiah da Bertinero visited Jerusalem in 1487, though impressed by the stones in the Wall, he felt no special religious emotion.37 Indeed, the Prophet Ezekiel saw the Divine Presence leave Jerusalem over the Mount of Olives after the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar.38

The spiritual idealism that created a kind of elasticity into the vision of the Temple Mount and its sacrality, expanding the axis mundi from the Temple Mount, to the city and beyond, remains distilled within the people’s consciousness as a Platonic ideal.

Conclusion

The aim of this research project was to ascertain the nature of the sacrality of the Western Wall, to discuss how sacrality may be artificially created and critically analyse the possibility of the Western Wall as an Eliadean Axis Mundi,

taking into account its historical and cultural significance and the religious
behaviour, ritual and atmosphere experienced at the Wall.

Using fieldwork, with thoughts and conclusions based on literature
devoted to the study of religion and its notion of sacrality, such as Otto, Eliade,
Durkheim, Bell and Smith, and methodology based primarily on Davies, the
nature of sacrality of the Western Wall was found, according to my personal
experience, to be defined by its boundaries and its experience, though
‘saturated with being’, in my experience could not be said to be so significantly
outstanding as to present an *axis mundi*.

The Wall’s sacredness, bound to the Temple that was, is the sacredness of
God in exile.

**Bibliography**

**Primary Sources**

Babylonian Talmud, *Chagigoh*, (Vilna: Romm and Brothers, 1835)

Babylonian Talmud, *Tosfos Qiddushin*, (Vilna Romm and Brothers 1835)

Hebrew Bible

*Zohar I*, (Mantua Edition, 1558)

**Secondary Sources**


Bell, Catharine, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford University Press)


Cairo, Josef, Shulchan Aruch


Davies, Charlotte Aul, Reflexive Ethnography; A guide to researching selves and others (Routledge, London, New York, 1999)


Butshatsh, Abraham, *Eshel Avraham*, (Buczacz: Dratler, 1906.)


Tilley, Christopher, Interpreting Landscapes: Geologies, Topographies, Identities; Explorations, *Landscape Phenomenology* 3 (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 15 Jun 2010)


**Photographs**

Figures 1 – 3: Public domain (Creative Commons License).

Figure 4: photograph by the author.
Predestination and negotiation in Western astrology

by LeeAnn Curtis

This essay examines the relationship between fate and free will to reveal active ways in which astrology can be used to prepare, temper, and accept the various levels of human destiny. Using a broad chronological and cultural sweep, from the classical world to the modern world, it addresses the contributions of Claudius Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* (141 CE), Marcus Manilius’s *Astronomica* (1st Century CE), Julius Firmicus Maternus’s *Eight Books of Mathesis* (334 CE), and Virahamhira’s *Brihat Jataka* (575 CE) along with Alan Leo’s *Esoteric Astrology* (1913) and Robert Zoller’s *The Lost Key to Prediction* (1980). This essay examines various themes of negotiation used by early astrologers such as the use of auspicious timing, counsel and advice, remedial measures, and the development of character. The probe of this discourse reveals that ‘negotiation’ in all of its variety is the real relationship between fate and free will.

This essay will examine the extent to which narratives of predestination is a feature of western astrology. It will examine the relationship between fate and free will to reveal active ways in which astrology can be used to prepare, temper, and accept the various levels of human destiny. The question of predestination will be reviewed using the following primary sources: Claudius Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* (141 CE), Marcus Manilius’s *Astronomica* (1st Century CE) Julius Firmicus Maternus’s *Eight Books of Mathesis* (334 CE), and Virahamhira’s *Brihat Jataka* (575 CE) along with Alan Leo’s *Esoteric Astrology* (1913) and Robert Zoller’s *The Lost Key to Prediction* (1980). This essay will examine various themes of negotiation used by early astrologers such as the use of auspicious timing, counsel and advice, remedial measures, and the development of character.

The term ‘predestination’ has been defined as divine foreknowledge or God’s foreknowledge by several secondary sources, and while astrological sources were not found to use this exact term, a common thread of a Stoic truth remains a constant; ‘divine fore-knowledge is a moral appropriation of responsibility’.1 It is not a person’s fate as one might assume, but more a person’s obligation to obey morality. In Stoic terms, predestination is ‘one’s internal inclination of the will to fend off causes of pain and accept what one cannot change and change what one can’.2 The idea that astral determinism

---

2 Lenn Evan Goodman, *Bahya on the Antinomy of Free Will and Predestination* p. 120
shows the instability of man is a compelling idea. It can engage an individual with acceptance of astrological predictions because it alludes to the idea that while certain events can be foreseen, free will can be used to negotiate acceptance and right action. To follow, a ‘narrative’ is an attempt to ‘communicate detail about events in time’ which lead participants from the simple to complex.³

Firstly, predestination could be negotiated in a significant number of ways according to the sources. First evidence of omen astrology from the Babylonians showed an intimate connection between the terrestrial and the celestial worlds. The omens themselves were presented to the kings by the scribes to communicate the will of the gods so that rituals and prayers could be developed to address them.⁴ Later, Plato used them as a stepping stone to refine managing destiny through mathematical astronomy.⁵ In early European pagan times, fate was determined at the end of life rather than the beginning. In the discussion of fate, Patrick Curry (2004) quotes this pagan era, ‘the shaping of destiny did not stop at birth, fate was perceived as a steady ongoing process, only fully completed at the end of a lifetime’.⁶ Predestination as narrative in this way is more about a journey of life and choices to be made. If, as in Plato’s Myth of Er (380-350 BC), one chooses their lot, then in essence they are choosing a goal; a goal to overcome something, to become something, and to rejoin with creation.⁷ This idea is further supported by Max Webber who argued that every single important action and life as a whole signifies a chain of cause and effect (otherwise known as decisions) where the soul chooses the fate of their future.⁸ This appears to echo the idea of Plato, that individuals decide what has meaning for their soul; he called it genius. In essence, a person’s desire to become is their predestination narrative. Nicholas Campion (2008) said that Plato used the

⁵ Nicholas Campion, The Dawn of Astrology, p. 151
⁷ Plato, Republic, Translated by Benjamin Jowett 1871 (New York: Barnes and Noble 2004) 343-352
⁸ Patrick Curry and Roy Willis, Astrology, Science and Culture p. 55
pluralist idea that astrology should be used to ‘manage becoming with mathematical astronomy’.  

Ancient science seems to have had a social and intellectual context of which Neoplatonism, alchemy, and astrology have had a role; subsequently the rules of inquiry have shaped the study of predestination narratives. Claudius Ptolemy (141 CE) argues that heavenly motions must be combined with the customs and particulars of the individual. In *Tetrabiblos*, Ptolemy states that strict care must be taken not to foretell future events by natural processes ‘unless properly considering all conditions of the future individual and the ambient’. In summary, Ptolemy says that one must combine planetary motions with education, country, customs, and rank to ‘render a course’. While astrology is conveyed as potent in affecting the properties of the individual; he admits, ‘since returns of planets never exactly repeat themselves; it must naturally follow that predictions are sometimes not born out by the events’. With the Hippocratic school of medicine (fourth century BC) there was an opportunity to unite predictions with medicine using the doctrine of the four qualities of hot, cold, wet, and dry which expressed themselves as the individual’s temperament. Since each planet expressed a quality and ruled a part of the body, diagnosis and treatments were emphasised. Therefore, medical astrology became a further consequence of cosmic sympathy involving complex herbal remedies, this is one place that the overt fatalism appears to recede.

Early stoicism has a firm hold on the predestination narrative by encouraging all citizens to accept their destiny. This acceptance is a skill to be learned for the determinism of such influential writers such as Marcus Manilius (first century CE) in *Astronomica*. The stars, he explains, ‘diversify the chequered fortunes of mankind’. One must ‘bear his appointed lot’ because by fate he is at birth given ‘skill, character, merits and defects, losses and gains’.

---

9 Nicholas Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology*, p. 160
12 Claudius Ptolemy, *Ptolemy’s Tetrabiblos* p. 9 book 1
13 Claudius Ptolemy, *Ptolemy’s Tetrabiblos* p. 8 book 1
15 Marcus Manilius, *Astronomica* p. 8 book 1
16 Marcus Manilius, *Astronomica* p. 225 book 4
translator of *Astronomica* G.P Gould explains that Manilius’s Book 4 claims that the ecliptic signs restore the idea that man is a microcosm of the universal macrocosm. This is an image of the divine by asserting that one can comprehend heaven, when heaven exists in their very beings in the likeness of God.\(^\text{17}\) This relationship between all things, parts of the universe, stars, and mankind are a snapshot of the stoically potent idea of *sympathia*.\(^\text{18}\) The astrological causality of Robert Zoller represents this stoic theme of pairing individuals with the divine via the natal chart. The desire to be separated or individualised seems to be one’s fate. Zoller explains astrological causality as metaphysics; the idea that all things flow out from the One which he calls ‘the First Principle.’\(^\text{19}\) He understands that roots of astrology are in-fact buried in an ‘astro-theology’ of the Chaldeans and the Egyptians with influences from India and China.\(^\text{20}\) This ‘First Principle’ is comprised of itself, the macrocosm, and the microcosm; ‘the stars and planets are the heart of the macrocosm and they were considered as lying at the center of Man’s being’.\(^\text{21}\) In other words, the celestial bodies along with their movements are located physically in our world (macrocosm) but also figuratively in our hearts (microcosm). In *Astronomica*, Manilus argues, ‘all heaven moves to the eternal spirit of reason and by sure tokens distinguishes the vicissitudes of fate’.\(^\text{22}\) N.C. Aiyar, the translator of *Brihat Jataka*, explains this further, ‘each man is a little world exactly representing the universe’.\(^\text{23}\) It has also been argued by Zoller that since the center of the world is in the human heart it is also the key to fate in early ‘astro-theology’.\(^\text{24}\) For ancient astrologers, the natal chart is where Man and God meet; he asserts that it’s the place where potentials and limitations mingle.\(^\text{25}\)

The Vedic (Hindu) tradition of Astrology hinges on a defined idea that the law of Karma will dictate what a person must accept as fate, and it’s not without

\(^{17}\) Marucs Manilius, *Astronomica* p. 223 book 4


\(^{19}\) Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction*, (New York: Inner Traditions Intl. 1980) p. 2

\(^{20}\) Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction* p 11

\(^{21}\) Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction* p. 21


\(^{23}\) Virahamahira, *The Brihat Jataka* p. 11

\(^{24}\) Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction*, p. 22

\(^{25}\) Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction*, p. 22
a negotiation. The science of horoscopy in India is to treat the effects of good and bad deeds (karma) of men in their previous births. There are three types of karma that can be seen in the chart: karma from a past life which is unalterable, karma that is ready to be experienced now of which you have freedom to improve, and future karma which is created based on your aspirations and subsequent accomplishments and duties including refinement. But more, the planets together ‘form a body of executive officers charged with the duty of rewarding and punishing humanity for past karma’, but at the same time allowing for the freedom to improve one’s life through prayer, mantras, and deva worship. The effects of unalterable karma in Hindu astrology are the fixed signs. But through freedom one can soften the fixed energy with complex remedial measures that prescribe repeating a mantra thousands of times per day, praying to the gods or goddesses who preside over the difficulty, wearing certain colours and fragrances, eating certain foods, and using gemstones to promote a full level of cooperation with the divine. Zoller supports this discussion by saying, ‘the key to unfolding karma is to be found in the study of astronomical law’ which he refers back to the ‘macrocosm and microcosm’ idea. The modern astrology of Alan Leo (1914) utilises the Hindu doctrine of karma to convey a new way to approach predestination. While Leo criticised Vedic astrology in some respects, he agreed with the idea that ‘man is both a slave of the effects of his past deeds and is a free agent in regard to fresh deeds’.

Depending on the culture, education, and rank of the astrologer; the negotiations of pre-destiny are comprised of advice. Examples of this advice are richly imbued with philosophy; such as that of Firmicus Maternus (334 CE). He does not overtly accept that one has any free will over destiny, the staunch determinism by which he is described by his translator, is softened by his desire to direct his clients into a proper course of action. It is the responsibility of the

26 Virahamahira, *Brihat Jataka* by N. Chidambaram Aiyar (Madras: Minerva Press 1905) p. 2
28 Virahamahira, *Brihat Jataka* p. 9
29 Hart de Fouw and Robert Svoboda, *Light on Life* p. 29
30 Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction* p. 21
31 Virahamahira, *Brihat Jataka* p. 6
astrologer to ‘educate the corrupt desires of men not only by responses but also by counsels’.33 Divine predestination ‘affords no excuse for moral lapses’ but show that God predestines and compels an individual to obey a moral responsibility to fend off causes of pain. To struggle against what one cannot change is a form of pain, according to the Stoics. In essence, Maternus who is considered one of the more determined Stoic fatalists, values the remedy of counsel and moral responsibility. Further, a more contemporary theme of negotiation is the one of advice; otherwise known as the epistemological view. Curry explains this as, the very act of cognizing and recognizing one’s fate changes it’.34 In other words, every prediction is necessarily also an intervention which is emphasised in his dialogue on divination; since astrology is a form of divination according to Curry. He finds support for his case with Geoffrey Cornelius who he cites as saying, ‘destiny is negotiable’ and to foretell the future is to create the future.35 Therefore, predestination narratives are reflective of the process of creation. Negotiation can also be choosing a lucky time for something. Jyotish (Hindu astrology) emphasises that all remedial measures must begin and end during auspicious times governed by astrology.36 Marcelino Ficino (1460) was considered an expert to consult on obtaining ‘the most propitious hour’ to lay a corner stone for instance.37 Ficino’s judgment of providence, fate, and free will was not to separate them but to explain the relationship between them. He is cited as saying, ‘the whole of the heaven is within us, gird yourself and together with me, temper your heavens’.38 Ficino favoured making talismans and medicines during favourable astrological times and days. The drawing down of cosmic power through Hermetic rituals from the Second century was a negotiation developed most significantly in the Renaissance.39 The revival of magical correspondences played a role in the Renaissance to create talismans and use music to contemplate the heavens. Paintings and murals could be seen

33 James Holden, A History of Horoscopic Astrology p.79
34 Patrick Curry and Roy Willis, Astrology, Science and Culture p. 55
35 Patrick Curry and Roy Willis, Astrology, Science and Culture p. 55
36 Hart de Fouw and Robert Svoboda, Light on Life p. 32
38 Melissa Merium Bullard, The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino’s Thought on Astrology, p. 698
39 Peter Whitfield, Astrology A History p. 146
as ways to accomplish this as well.\textsuperscript{40} Ficino put measures in place to ‘utilise the heavens to avoid dangers’ with a variety of remedies.\textsuperscript{41} But not only that, his idea that the zodiac lies within each person opened up a way to use a form of psychology to ‘conceptualise astrological influences’.\textsuperscript{42} Under Ficino, mastering the heavens equals cooperation with a remedial measure.

In the modern era, the theory of predestination is tempered with the negotiation of depth psychology. Leo fathered this approach by publishing the idea that character is destiny.\textsuperscript{43} But he does not stand apart from his predecessors; locating the zodiac within the soul equalled a new psychological way of conceptualizing astrological influences by making one’s life agree with the heavens according to Ficino.\textsuperscript{44} The theme that the physical destiny can also be studied and negotiated agrees with both Ptolemy and Leo. Ptolemy used the physician as an example of this; ‘proper constitution of the sick person, his disease, every other consideration, in addition to the motion of the planets’.\textsuperscript{45} Virahamahira uses the mixture of Moon and Mars as a result of ‘mensus’ appearing for women.\textsuperscript{46} In more detail, Leo states that the birth moment will indicate the type of body and type of personality the person will have as well as the true character of the soul.\textsuperscript{47} For him, each personality is a new evolution of the soul and the structure of the nervous system either permits free action of consciousness (talents), hinders it by the less prominent planets (building of skills) or stops its altogether (hardship) with very weak planets for karmic reasons.\textsuperscript{48} Leo promotes that the character belongs to the soul, the soul has faculties, and its efficiency is based on the body as the vehicle. The idea that the body, brain and nervous system go with special types of character are inherent in the esoteric astrology of Leo, the body fits the soul like a glove; he says that

\textsuperscript{40} Peter Whitfield, \textit{Astrology A History} p. 149
\textsuperscript{41} Melissa Merium Bullard, \textit{The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino’s Thought on Astrology}, p. 699
\textsuperscript{42} Melissa Merium Bullard, \textit{The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino’s Thought on Astrology}, p. 699
\textsuperscript{43} Alan Leo, \textit{The Progressed Horoscope} (London, L.N. Fowler Ltd. 1905) p.4
\textsuperscript{44} Melissa Merium Bullard, \textit{The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino’s Thought on Astrology}, p. 702
\textsuperscript{45} Claudius Ptolemy, \textit{Tetrabiblos} p. 11
\textsuperscript{46} Virahamahira, \textit{The Brihat Jataka} p. 11
\textsuperscript{47} Alan Leo, \textit{Esoteric Astrology} (New York: Astrologer’s Library 1913) p. 103
\textsuperscript{48} Alan Leo, \textit{Esoteric Astrology} p. 103
the plan of the body is expressive of both fate and character and this is the fabric upon which the horoscope is built.\textsuperscript{49}

**Conclusion**

When examining the relationship between fate and free will each of the primary sources elucidate the idea of negotiation. This ‘negotiation’ is actually what defines a predestination narrative in western astrology. Ptolemy said that one must negotiate astrological information with mental preparedness and tranquility because the ‘unforeseen will either overwhelm the mind with terror or destroy its composure’.\textsuperscript{50} Plato was suggesting early on that the process of becoming can be managed with the math of astrology. Ficino believed that we can temper our heavens by personal choices, medicines, and talismans. Ptolemy suggested that we can prepare ourselves for stormy weather both figuratively and literally. According to Leo, tendencies can be drawn out of a perfect mathematics formula, but ultimately the soul will decide if it’s going to separate or unite with the oneness of all things. The recognition of the divine operating within us is paramount for Zoller who suggests that our fate is where the potentials and limits of life mingle. The Stoicism of Manilius and Maternus echo the divine connection with the idea of sympathy between man and cosmos. The doctrine of karma explains that some things cannot be altered because they are consequences of past life actions, meanwhile the individual is a free agent to refine his responses to destiny. The doctrine of temperaments offer diagnosis and remedy for diseases. It comes to pass after these careful and complex considerations that predestination narratives are present in eastern and western astrology. They are negotiations of earthly life through counsel, remedial measures, preparedness, character development, coupled with the timing of predictions and auspicious moments; the natal chart is necessarily the place that the individual meets and comingles with its future.

**Bibliography**


\textsuperscript{49} Alan Leo, *Esoteric Astrology* p. 112

\textsuperscript{50} Claudius Ptolemy, *Ptolemy’s Tetrabiblos*, p. 13

Bullard, Melissa Merium *The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino’s Thought on Astrology*, (Renaissance Quarterly Vol. 43, No. 4, Winter 1990) p. 687-708


Lilly, William, *Christian Astrology* (Bel Air MD: Astrology Classics 2004 from 1647)

Leo, Alan, *Esoteric Astrology* (New York: Astrologer’s Library 1913)

Leo, Alan, *The Progressed Horoscope* (London, L.N. Fowler Ltd. 1905)


Virahamahira, *Brihat Jataka* (Madras: Minerva Press 1905)


Zoller, Robert *The Lost Key to Prediction*, (New York: Inner Traditions Intl. 1980)
Worship of the Stars: Celestial Themes in Observance and Practice of the Sacred

In some cultures the sun, moon, stars and planets are worshipped. In others they may be revered as representatives or symbols of divinity. Sometimes the sky itself is divine. In sacred texts celestial bodies are often metaphors for, or symbols of, gods or goddesses. Often sacred spaces and buildings are designed with a specific relationship to the celestial bodies.

This conference will examine the relationship between the sky, the celestial bodies and notions of divinity, religious practice and observance through the perspectives of imagery, myth, anthropology, performance, literary studies and the history of art, the study of religions and more.

Bath Literary and Scientific Institute

25-26 June 2016

Bookings and information: http://sophia-project.net/conferences/WorshipOfStars/
Christians and the Sky

by Kevin Marley

Ingold argues that our view of the world is altered by living most of our life indoors, and that we lack contact with the ‘outside’. Additionally, Nicholas Campion points out that the sky has always held a sense of awe and wonder for humanity. Thus do contemporary humans still seek a connection to the sky and the outside? The religious factor is a perspective that is not touched upon by Ingold or Campion. Therefore, this project examines if young members of a Christian church do in fact have a sense of awe when looking at the sky. Questionnaires and interviews were used to determine the feelings and thoughts about the sky of a group of church-going Christians. This paper shows that this sense of ‘awe’ and wonder is brought on by incorporating their beliefs into their image of the sky. Without this perspective taken into account, we cannot say that all of humanity shares the same sense of awe.

Introduction

Modern society finds itself indoors more often than being in the outside world. Tim Ingold argues that our view of the world is altered by living most of our life indoors and that we lack contact with the ‘outside’.

Additionally, Nicholas Campion points out that the sky has always held a sense of awe and wonder for humanity.

Thus, do contemporary humans still seek a connection to the sky and the outside? The first religious belief systems of people were deeply entwined with the sky, as shown by Campion when he tells of a ‘tradition of solar religion’.

With a lot of modern scientific inquiry directed at the sky, one would think there would still be much interest in looking at the sky. However, as A. A. Sappington describes, there appears to be a ‘tension [between] science and religion’ with just one historical example being the controversy surrounding Galileo’s correct heliocentric notion of the solar

---

3 Campion, A History of Western Astrology, p. 5
Based on this historical tension between science and religion a question that could be asked is; are people who attend a Christian Church regularly less likely to want to engage with the sky? If so, do they bring their religious beliefs into their ideas of the sky? By examining if young members of a Christian church do in fact have a sense of ‘awe’ when looking at the sky one could reaffirm or deny Campion’s general statement about the wonderment of mankind. Furthermore, if this sense of awe is found, an exploration of where this belief comes from can further explore the idea that a relationship to the sky is a fundamental human trait that is independent of religious beliefs. The answer could shed light on where this fascination comes from for the subjects’ interviewed, whether they incorporate their beliefs into their image of the sky or somehow reconcile science and religion. Additionally, the modern religious factor is a perspective that is not touched upon by Ingold or Campion. Campion and Ingold did not focus on religious beliefs in their arguments concerning the human relationship to the sky, however this research project places religious belief as central and explores wonderment of the sky through that lens.

After reviewing the literature, I conducted interviews and administered surveys to members of a local Christian community. I conclude that members of this Christian community who are between the ages of 20 and 30 do have a sense of awe with the sky. Also, rather than being challenged by their Christian beliefs this sense of awe appears to be enhanced.

**Literature Review**

The inspiration of the sky is found throughout history: many ancient cultures developed entire belief and agricultural systems based on the sky. Campion mentions ancient cultures as having a belief system that included the sky. However, people of the modern world may not share that same wonder with the sky. The question concerning people of the modern world and their continued amazement at the sky comes into question with Ingold’s paper, ‘Earth Wind Fire Water’. Ingold believes that, due to modern society’s

---


5 Campion, *A History of Western Astrology*, p. 5

6 Campion, *A History of Western Astrology*, p. 5
preference to be indoors, we are losing touch with the outside world.\textsuperscript{7} He fears that a lack of outdoor experiences makes our minds work in a different way: rather than acknowledging the whole world, we only acknowledge things indoors in our confined spaces.\textsuperscript{8} Campion describes a different story. He believes the sense of ‘awe’ that ancient civilizations held with the sky has extended to modern day.\textsuperscript{9} If Campion is correct then this inherent trait, to be fascinated with the sky, prevents us from truly thinking in indoor terms. Also, the increased interest in astronomy by the scientific community suggests modern society still feels a sense of awe with the sky. In talking about the contributions of different scientific fields, William Stoeger exclaims, ‘cosmology and astronomy play this role more forcefully and less ambiguously than many of the other sciences’.\textsuperscript{10} Therefore, modern man still has some sense of wonder, at least related to astronomy, about the sky. This would confirm that ‘[n]obody, it is said, can gaze at a magnificent sky without being moved by it’, as stated by Campion.\textsuperscript{11}

The extant literature tends to depict a separation from religion and science. Thus, due to a perceived tension between science and religion Christians might not share a sense of wonder. Walter Clark says, ‘[Religion] and science deal with different parts of the universe and have entirely different attitudes towards the universe’.\textsuperscript{12} This depicts two differing cosmologies that have a hard time overlapping, as Jamil Ragep explains, ‘because it was one of the ‘ancient sciences’, astronomy was sometimes tarred with the same brush that besmirched any knowledge that fell out-side [sic] the domain of the religious sciences’.\textsuperscript{13} This could suggest Christians would not find a sense of ‘awe’ in the sky since inquiry into the sky is now such a large part of the scientific community, and religion and science appear to be two separate cosmologies.

\textsuperscript{7} Ingold, Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather, p. 32
\textsuperscript{8} Ingold, Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather, p. 32
\textsuperscript{9} Campion, A History of Western Astrology, p. 5
\textsuperscript{11} Campion, A History of Western Astrology, p.5
Rather, religious believers may find awe in their religious beliefs and religious imagery. Thus, the increasing scientific interest in astronomy combined with the historic divide between science and religion may be off-putting for people with religious beliefs.\(^{14}\) This could potentially put an end to any sense of ‘awe’ they might have held with the sky.

One particular group for which it is not clear if a sense of ‘awe’ in the sky exists is for those belonging to a western religion such as Christianity.\(^{15}\) With a potential tension between science and religion, it would seem that people with religious beliefs may not be aware of the advancements in the field of science.\(^{16}\) Furthermore, Stoeger describes how cosmology and astronomy push the boundaries of reality, which explains how one might find awe in the night sky.\(^{17}\)

**Methodology**

Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter, and Ajay Bailey explain that since the notion in question deals with examining ‘personal experience from people about a specific issue or topic’, interviews could illuminate information a questionnaire could not, such as personal stories that the interview subject may have in regards to the topic.\(^{18}\) Alan Bryman also argues, ‘when quantitative and qualitative research are jointly pursued, much more complete accounts of social reality can ensue’.\(^{19}\) Therefore, I felt the best method to explore the question of Christians’ relationship with the sky was through using mixed methods of interviews and questionnaires.

I conducted my research in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada in early 2014. The target group consisted of 12, 20-30 year old people who attend Christian church regularly. This target group was easily accessed as they are very prevalent in my community. I know some of them personally as friends and some of them I met for the first time.

\(^{14}\) Ragep, p. 49


\(^{16}\) Sappington, The Religion/Science Conflict, p. 114

\(^{17}\) Stoeger, Astronomy’s Integrating Impact on Culture: A Ladrièranean Hypothesis, p. 152


I engaged five willing participants for interviews from my target group and I chose to conduct the interviews in the home of two of the interviewees. This would hopefully put the interviewees at ease in a familiar location. I recruited the interview subjects through a friend who engages with the interviewees at a local church. They are all very active members of the church. For this topic, Alan Bryman describes how engaging participants in a semi-structured interview is best as this allows some freedom for the participant to elaborate on their answers, but also keeps the interview on important topics ‘crucial to the study’. The method of interviews ended up being group discussion due to time constraints. However, the ultimate reason for this was I found out that these interviewees engage in group discussions twice a week. Being familiar with this type of discussion process allowed them to feel more at ease than they would feel in one-on-one interviews. Furthermore, within a group discussion interviewees were able to build upon each other’s answers. At times, some of the interviewees felt they did not have the correct word to express their feelings and through group discussion they were able to overcome this problem.

Seven other subjects received questionnaires. Through constructing the questionnaire, I became aware of ‘what [my] questions might mean to different respondents’, an idea put forth by Judith Bell. Bell also lists different types of questionnaires. For a study of personal experience, a list type of questionnaire allows for the selection of more than one choice, which will show overlap of some key ideas in the study. Combined with standard multiple choice questions, a more well-rounded survey can be produced. I devised the questions after reviewing the various studies of T.L Brink, Tony Walter, Helen Waterhouse, and of Yael Naze and Sebastien Fontaine. I wished to follow Walter and Waterhouse’s style of interviews, which gives a level of insight that could not be found using questionnaires such as in Brink’s and Naze’s papers. Naze and Fontaine’s study was a ‘dedicated astronomical survey’ that informed my selection of questions, despite their study being narrower in that they

---

20 Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*, p.163-165
21 Hennink, p.111
23 Bell, *Doing Your Research Project*, p. 142
merely ‘show[ed] that an interest for astronomy exists’.\(^{24}\) I tested the first questionnaire on a few friends of mine who do not belong to any religion. Through the pilot test, I found some questions that worked and changed some questions to allow for more diversity. I used two digital recorders in case one malfunctioned. I also used the Survey Monkey website to administer my questionnaire via email and social media.\(^{25}\)

I made sure to be courteous to the interviewees since they held very strong beliefs so I made sure not to ask about certain controversial topics such as questioning the reality of God. It was quite difficult to set up interviews individually, so by inviting everyone to one place so we could conduct a group discussion. Furthermore, due to time constraints and constant reschedules, I had to limit the number of participants to those who could meet on the day scheduled. I found that through using a mixed method I was able to reach a larger group of people and a more random sample size. However, I was unable to get as many completed surveys as I would have liked so in the future I think that handing surveys out in person will get a better return rate. Also, I ended up using a group semi-structured interview. Despite going well, there were a few moments where people would build on each other and not answer the question for themselves. Although, through building off of each other’s answers I got a deeper look into certain ideas for which I could not have asked the appropriate question. I would have also liked to have had one-on-one interviews as well to make sure that I was able to capture the individual’s answer and then later engage in a group discussion. Furthermore, there were a small number of participants and I would have preferred a larger number of both interviewees and survey responses.

**Reflexive Considerations**

My assumptions at the beginning of the project were that almost none of my participants would feel anything towards the sky. I assumed this based on my interaction with Christians in day-to-day life and prejudicially find them out of touch with scientific topics. However, comparing my pilot test to the actual results, I found my results to the contrary. My target group exceeded my expectations for their awareness of the sky and how they feel about it. I tried to

---

\(^{24}\) Naze, Yael, and Sebastien Fontaine. ‘An astronomical survey conducted in Belgium’ in *Physic Education* 49 (2014), p. 2

\(^{25}\) Survey Monkey [https://www.surveymonkey.com/](https://www.surveymonkey.com/) [last accessed 18.3.2016]
limit my biases and reworded my questions until I had what I perceived as a neutral question and was aware of the reflexive nature of the question. However, I found myself engaging with the interview subjects who looked to me for reassurance. Through these minor bits of dialogue, I may have unknowingly influenced or changed future answers.

I was an outsider with this particular group, despite being an insider in terms of age and location. I had an etic, or outsider, perspective when it came to quotations from the Bible that needed to be fully stated and explained for my benefit.26 However, with my limited knowledge of the Christian faith, I was able to come closer to an emic, or insider, perspective as the questions turned to explore the participants’ understanding of the sky.

Ethical considerations

At the time of arranging the interviews, each interviewee was informed of the nature of the research project and that their interview, with their permission, was going to be recorded and transcribed to allow for extensive quotations to be used in this essay. In this regard they were informed that they could at any time either withdraw or request anonymity. Of the five interviews, nobody chose to withdraw their interview. All of the interviewees signed release forms. I used pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees.

Findings/Discussion

Ingold makes solid points regarding the amount of time that people spend indoors.27 This was a good place to start, as I wanted to determine if the target group also fell into the norm of being indoors the majority of the time. All of the interviewees claimed to enjoy being outside: two subjects in particular, Greg and Darren, find themselves outside quite often. The results of the survey, however, found only one person who is frequently outdoors, while the rest still enjoyed being outside but found themselves indoors for most of the day. The reasons for being outside ranged widely, from going for a walk and playing sports to going site seeing both natural and man-made.

27 Ingold, Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather, p. 28
While being inside the activities were quite consistent, mostly reading or being on the computer. However, Susan did make note that even though she is still technically inside, she is not always in her house as she is going to school or going out with friends. Furthermore, while inside, the entire interview group felt natural light was very important. This is in contrast to Ingold, who maintains that spending too much time indoors will cause us to miss out on the outside world. With all the enjoyment of the outdoors, my next step was to find if perhaps the divide between indoors and outdoors was not as important as Ingold claims. Ingold postulates that spending so much time indoors has caused us to think about the world differently. Three of the interviewees said they felt safe when being indoors while one did express feeling cut off as Ingold suggests.

---

28 Ingold, Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather, p. 28
29 Ingold, Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather, p.28
Chart 2
How do you feel when indoors?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>33.33% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheltered</td>
<td>83.33% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut off</td>
<td>33.33% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caged</td>
<td>33.33% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The surveys had somewhat mixed responses, but sheltered was the most commonly selected feeling. Inside seems to be a different place in this depiction, which is in line with Ingold’s view. For example, the interviewees said they felt a difference when being indoors versus outdoors, which is what Ingold believed would happen. Ingold states, ‘[it is one thing] to think about land and weather; [it is] quite another to think in them’.  

I tried to discover the level of interest in astronomy and outer space topics amongst the subjects. The interviews revealed that only one interviewee was intently interested in astronomy. When asked if they cared about recent scientific discoveries in astronomy, Greg responded:

Astronomy, yeah. And also something more intense like particle physics. I love to think about the Higgs-Boson and everything that deals with that. I, work in the science centre in the astronomy section so I’ve had formal training in a couple areas.

The other interviewees were interested but to a lesser degree. They would be inquisitive if information was presented to them but only Emma, who was a teaching assistant in a first year astronomy class, would actively find information on new discoveries. She explained that ‘[she is] always getting updates on discoveries’. The survey responses showed that a majority do have an interest in astronomy, as more than 70 percent said they think of sky often. These answers suggest some interest in the sky which adds support to Campion’s idea that everyone finds ‘awe’ with regard to the sky.  

30 Ingold, *Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather*, p. 28
31 Campion, *A History of Western Astrology*, p. 5
I then directed the discussion to any potential disconnect between religion and science, as presented by Walter Clark.\textsuperscript{32} When asked about their initial thoughts when first looking at the stars, I got very unique responses. No two were the same. I asked the interviewees to take me through their train of thought when looking up at the stars. Darren explains:

It would be at first a sense of ‘oh, that’s so beautiful’ I’m glad I’m out of the city so I can finally look at the stars. And it’s a sense of awe and it makes me feel like I’m falling off the earth a bit. It feels a little overwhelming. It’s also the sense of feeling small and inconsequential, and I think reaffirming for my faith as a Christian, to think of something that’s so vast and complicated and seemingly designed or something. That God could create that. Or maybe it was the Big Bang. Or I don’t know. I don’t know how God could have created it, maybe He created it through the Big Bang or something. I feel like you can actually connect to God through that, and I don’t think you even need to be a Christian to experience that.

Also, Lindsay explained her excitement:

I always feel overwhelmed when I look up at the stars and then I feel really small and that God has created the world so beautifully, like when I look up at the stars and they’re so intricately placed and there are so many of them and why are there so many of them and why… I just feel really happy and I just automatically think about God because I just believe He created the stars so I just associate that with Him, and the feeling of joy and all those things. So yeah, it’s very awe-inspiring. It’s amazing that God would create that.

Greg turned to religion in his statement:

When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of him, and the being that you care for him?\textsuperscript{33}

Susan followed up with a combination of Greg and Lindsay’s sentiments with her feelings of the sky:

Yeah, I think I draw from each of your examples. It’s very awe-inspiring. It’s a sense of smallness and a sense of... I don’t know, you’re forced to understand your place in the world and the greatness that surrounds you. It’s just so complicated, and that part is mind-boggling

\textsuperscript{32} Clark, Religion and Science, p. 101
\textsuperscript{33} Psalm 8:3-4 NIV
to me, just the purpose of the two. Why is it this way? Why is it not a
green sky? It makes me curious about the ‘why’ of things. Yeah. A very
small feeling. I can get that feeling where you lay back and feel dizzy.
For some reason I think there’s a very spiritual aspect of the sky that
many people can connect with.

Emma struggled to put her feelings into words:

It’s like so awe-inspiring that you just sit there and don’t say anything
because there’s not any words that can capture the beauty and the sense
of awe and purpose and smallness, that freedom that you feel.

All these emotions and thoughts, ranging from a Bible verse quoted by
Greg to a sense a beauty felt by Darren and a feeling of ‘being overwhelmed’ as
stated by Lindsay, may be incompatible with scientific theories regarding the
universe. I followed up with asking if this feeling was ever conflicted with other
feelings or thoughts or things they have been told. The majority of
questionnaire responses expressed some sense of disconnect between feelings
upon seeing the night sky and what has been told or taught. This could show
the tension between religion and science, as identified by Clark when he says,
‘in all religious institutions we find constantly recurring conflicts of ancient
tradition and later knowledge’. However, the interviewees did not express
the same level of conflict. In discussion they were able to reconcile the two
perspectives of science and religion without the need to abandon one.

I followed up by asking the interviewees if they would ever actively
schedule looking at the night sky. I had strong preconceived ideas about the
willingness to participate in stargazing activities. However, this was not
supported in my field work. All of my interviewees had gone stargazing in the
past. This was not simply due to interest in astronomy; rather, this was clearly
about being intrigued by the mystery of the sky in the manner that Campion
eludes too.

I concluded the interviews with questions about the cultural impact of the
sky as outlined in Stoeger’s exposition that ‘cosmology and astronomy push the
boundaries of reality’. Only Greg, after spending some time to think, was able
to guess that ancient cultures built structures in accordance with astronomical
alignments. However, the majority of survey responses claimed to know about

34 Clark, *Religion and Science*, p.101
35 Campion, *A History of Western Astrology*, p. 5
36 Stoeger, *Astronomy’s Integrating Impact on Culture: A Ladrièrean Hypothesis*, p. 152
the practice of astronomy by ancient cultures. Yet, when asked about modern examples of astronomy shaping society, Darren presented an interesting example:

Last year I did a placement in a community development branch and the whole King Street strip in Hamilton is designed for maximum sun to shine on the street. So there are no buildings that, when the sun comes up past a certain degree over the escarpment, the sun will clear the top of the building. All of the high rise buildings are placed where they will cast the shadow over non-feature parts of the strip. All of the positions and shape of the buildings have been planned so that sunlight is optimised along King Street so that it’s more enjoyable and walkable.

Greg followed up with his own thoughts,

I think that the sky has started to shape North America after the blackout in 2003, the really big one, because I’ve noticed almost immediately people have took a vested interest in eliminating light pollution because they finally noticed what the sky was like, and the city took out the street lights that shone up; they only have the ones that shine down to eliminate light pollution. Some cities make you turn your lights off after a certain time – like businesses that are supposed to turn their lights off at night if they’re closed to decrease light pollution.

Lindsay presented her own experience:

When we go to Hawaii, there’s a mountain – all of the lights in that city are types of dark bulbs so the glow is very different when you look over that city than when you look over Hamilton, and it doesn’t affect your view of the sky at all because there are lots of observatories.

These statements show an awareness of the scientific advancements regarding city design and the push for less light pollution such as in those places belonging to the Dark Sky Association. Stoeger identifies the cultural impact of astronomy and astrology as ‘forceful…by prodding us toward new values’.37 Despite the ideas presented in Ragep and Clark’s literature, the subject group embraced the questions pertaining to the mysteries of the sky, which they expand upon with their religious beliefs.

The sense of ‘awe’ identified by Campion would appear still prevalent from my small sample of young Christians. Also, demonstrated here is a unity of religion and science in the lives of the interviewees. It seems not only is there

37 Stoeger, Astronomy’s Integrating Impact on Culture: A Ladrièrean Hypothesis, p. 152
a sense of ‘awe’ present in these people when looking at the sky, but also a
deeper understanding of how that mystery fits in with their beliefs as well as
an awareness of the social impact of the sky on modern culture. Nothing
appears lost by spending time indoors so therefore Ingold’s findings are not
supported.

**Conclusion**

Members of modern society spend a great deal of time indoors. Ingold
questions if this modern lifestyle is causing humans to miss out on the majesty
of the outdoors. Campion interjects with the idea that there is still a deeply
rooted sense of awe that humans have for the sky. The notion of whether people
still feel a sense of awe when looking at the sky was explored within a context
of western religion. Sappington argues that due to the historical divide between
science and religion, it is no longer clear if Christians still have a sense of
wonder with the sky and he suggests that this is due to the advances of
astronomy turning the mystery of the sky into more a scientific venture.\(^{38}\) The
extant literature tends to focus on the relationship between religious beliefs and
the sky, which further suggests a divide between science and religion.\(^{39}\)
Building on this premise, I conducted interviews and handed out a
questionnaire that would shed light on this topic. I found that members of my
small group do still feel a sense of awe from the sky. Furthermore, their belief
systems were found to play a major role in how they experience and express
their amazement. This is important if scholars are to claim that all of humanity
still feels a sense of awe in regards to the sky. My research found that for my
group of young Christians their view of the world is not altered by living most
of their life indoors and we do not necessarily lack contact with the ‘outside’.
Perhaps we, as a society, we merely do not observe the sky as much as we used
to.

**Bibliography**

Bell, Judith, Stephen Waters, *Doing Your Research Project*. England and New York: Open

\(^{38}\) Sappington, *The Religion/Science Conflict*, p. 114

\(^{39}\) Sappington, *The Religion/Science Conflict*, p. 114


Jodi, F., ‘Religion and Modern Science’ in *The Monist* 3, N°3 (April 1893)


Ragep, Jamil, and Ali al-Qushji. ‘Freeing Astronomy from Philosophy: An Aspect of Islamic Influence on Science’ in *Osiris* 16 (2001) 49-71


Survey Monkey [https://www.surveymonkey.com/](https://www.surveymonkey.com/) [last accessed 18.3.2016]

The role of folkloric pre-Islamic anwā’ in Islamic Arabia

By Mai Lootah

This qualitative study attempts to document and re-assess how personal cosmological beliefs of contemporary Arabs shape their perception, understanding and interaction with anwā’, an endangered pre-Islamic stellar folklore immortalised for centuries through poetry and rhymed prose. Through the use of ethnographic in-depth interviews, this paper investigates and compares the significance of anwā’ in the lives of two groups of contemporary Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula; literate urbanised self-taught anwā’ ‘practitioners’ from different parts of Saudi Arabia, and Kuwaiti Bedouins who spontaneously ‘inherited’ this lore through generations of word of mouth. An absence of pagan elements in the folklore of anwā’ in its present form was noticed, which seems to have stemmed from a major cosmological transformation that mirrored a theological transformation. The Islamic principle of tawhīd, or strict monotheism, clearly underlies the cosmological views of all participants, not merely surpassing pre-Islamic beliefs, but totally negating them.

Introduction

Daniel Martin Varisco explored how Arabs, through their linguistic eloquence, made use of ‘folklore, poetry and rhymed prose’ to immortalise stellar beliefs known as anwā’, passing them from one generation to another. However, Varisco suggested that whatever had survived of this pre-Islamic oral tradition had undergone a historical selective process, for as he opined, what we have is ‘what compilers have chosen to preserve.’ Moreover, anthropological studies by both Varisco and Clinton Bailey revealed that this indigenous folklore is rapidly diminishing. The aforementioned hence

1 Daniel Martin Varisco, ‘The Origin of the anwā’ in Arab Tradition,’ Studia Islamica, no.74 (1991), [hereafter Varisco, ‘The Origin of the anwā’ in Arab Tradition’]: pp.5-6
2 Varisco, ‘The Origin of the anwā’ in Arab Tradition’, p.25
necessitates an ethnographic qualitative study to re-evaluate the role played by the pre-Islamic cosmological folklore of anwā’ in the lives of two groups of contemporary Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula. This paper investigates the significance of anwā’ to literate urbanised Arab ‘practitioners’; how they perceive it, interpret it, and how it reflects their cosmological views. Through the use of ethnographic in-depth interviews, this paper also attempts to gain a direct experience of this oral tradition of stellar lore from Bedouins who ‘inherited’ it through generations of word of mouth, exploring the meanings and beliefs they attach to its metaphoric rhymed prose. Additionally, this paper will serve in documenting the remnants of what Varisco believed to be an inadequately studied and endangered folklore.4

**Literature review**

Anwā’ as a cosmology provided Arabs with a seasonal framework necessary for their survival in the harsh climate of the Arabian deserts. Nevertheless, Freya Mathews argues that cosmological beliefs are also shaped by multiple social factors.5 Nicholas Campion agrees, writing that cosmological beliefs mirror fundamental religious worldviews.6 According to Sahīh Muslim (821-875 CE), one of the most trusted compilations of prophetic sayings, Prophet Muḥammad said, ‘Among my people there are four characteristics belonging to paganism which they do not abandon; boasting of high rank, reviling other peoples’ genealogies, seeking rain by stars, and wailing.’7 Furthermore, historian Mahmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī (1856-1924) wrote that this belief in anwa’ was a trait of pre-Islamic Arabic Sabaean tribes who did not ‘travel or inhabit a land without looking at the heliacal setting of stars.’8 Hence

4 Varisco, ‘Stars and Texts in Arabia’
one may assume that the study of *anwā‘* may outline pre-Islamic cultural contexts and beliefs that co-existed with this folklore. However, these pre-Islamic beliefs may have been overshadowed, if not negated, by an Islamic cosmology that Seyyed Hossein Nasr described as firmly based on strict monotheism that reflects the concept of ‘Unity of the Divine’ or *tawhīd* which underlies all cosmological Islamic speculations.\(^9\) The dominant Ash‘arite school of theology, Nasr elaborated, expressed their understanding of *tawhīd* through the attribution of absolute omnipotence to God; the direct cause of all effects.\(^10\)

Studying the literary significance of *anwā‘*, Abdulla bin Salim al-Rashid suggests that the rhetoric eloquence of Arabs, articulated as rhymed prose, was crucial for regulating the lives of the illiterate nomadic tribes of Arabia.\(^11\) Yet the true value of this oral tradition, al-Rashid opines, lies in its capacity to artistically portray the social and ecological context of the nomadic life.\(^12\) Likewise, al-Bīrūnī (973-1048 CE) noted in his *Chronology*:

> The Arabs had, moreover, one advantage in which others did not share; this is the perpetuation of what they know or believed, right or wrong, praise or blame, by means of their poetry (Ḳaṣīdas), by Rajaz poems, and by compositions in rhymed prose. These things one generation inherited from the other, so as to remain among them and after them.\(^13\)

*Anwā‘* was hence studied by medieval linguists and philologists such as ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī (828-885 CE) and ibn al-Ajdābī (d. 1077 CE).\(^14\)

---

9 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Bath: Thames and Hudson, 1978), [hereafter Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*]: p.4


12 al-Rashid, p.372


14 Abū Mohammad ʻAbdulla ibn Muslim ibn Qutayba Al-Dinawarī, *al-Anwā‘ Fi Mawāsim Al-ʻArab Or Astro-Meteorology of the Arabs* (Baghdad: Dar al-Shoʻoun al-
Nonetheless, Varsico suggested that whatever had been compiled is ‘fragmentary’ and not a true representation of the indigenous anwā’, owing to the lack of objective methodology by early Muslim compilers.\textsuperscript{15} Absence of pagan ideas in the medieval textual sources, Varsico argued, shows that anwā’ as a tradition was deliberately ‘Islamicised’.\textsuperscript{16} These views were vehemently challenged by the Saudi anthropologist Saad A. Sowayan who suggested that religion is ‘ḥadhari,’ or belongs to the urbanised, for the harshness of the desert does not allow for any metaphysical contemplations.\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, Gustave E. von Grunebaum noticed that the classical pre-Islamic poet of Arabia responded faster to the threatening aspects of the desert than to ‘the charm of the idyllic.’\textsuperscript{18} Grunebaum also observed that previously held beliefs cannot be easily concealed from oral traditions, as these ‘continue, sometimes in a ghost like manner, and are resumed or restated time and again.’\textsuperscript{19} This paper will attempt to reassess the value of anwā’ in modern day Arabia through a qualitative study, paying particular attention to the relevant cosmological and linguistic contexts. Such ‘contextualism,’ as Alan Bryman wrote, provides a holistic framework that allows phenomena to be ‘explicated and understood in their entirety.’\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{15} Varisco, ‘The Origin of the anwā’ in Arab Tradition’, pp.25-28
\textsuperscript{17} Saad Abdullah Sowayan, \textit{The Arabian Desert: Its Poetry and Culture Across the Ages, an Anthropological Approach} (Riyadh: King Saud University, 2010), [hereafter Sowayan]: pp.47-49
\textsuperscript{19} Grunebaum, p.142
\textsuperscript{20} Alan Bryman, \textit{Quantity and Quality in Social Research} (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), [hereafter Bryman]: p.64
Methodology

In studies that investigate culturally shaped worldviews of a particular community, Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Baily recommended ethnography as the most suitable approach.\(^{21}\) Bryman also wrote that an interpretive paradigm enables one to ‘penetrate the frames of meaning’ that participants attach to their worldviews.\(^{22}\) Hence, in order to document and explore the folklore of anwā’, an ethnographic qualitative interpretive study was conducted with participants living in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Saudi Arabia was chosen because of its vast area stretching over most of the Arabian Peninsula, and subsequently its potentiality to provide this study with a reasonably holistic picture of how anwā’ was practiced by different tribes and localities in Arabia. The participants were deliberately chosen from different localities in Saudi Arabia; Tabūk in the north, Jeddah in the west overlooking the Red Sea, al-Qaţīf (near Ad Dammām) in the east overlooking the Persian Gulf and Najd in the central region (FIG. 1.). One of the two Jeddah participants was of Yemeni origins, specifically from Ḥaḍramaut. In contrast, Kuwait was chosen on account of its high Bedouin population, known locally as badū, and which according to Anh Nga Longva was estimated to have been around 60% in 2006.\(^{23}\) These badū, Longva explained, are mostly immigrants from Saudi Arabia who still ‘stubbornly hold on to their tribal ways.’\(^{24}\) All of the Kuwaiti participants live in the governorate of al-Jahra; described by Longva as an ‘outlying area’ mostly occupied by badū.\(^{25}\) In accordance to the recommendation of Hennink et al., in-depth guided interviews were prepared in advance for the Saudi participants in order to yield adequate information on the topics explored.\(^{26}\) The open questions of the interviews were supplemented with topical probes to elicit adequate responses and ‘ensure that detailed information is collected on all issues of interest,’ as Hennink et al. suggested.\(^{27}\)


\(^{22}\) Bryman, p.61


\(^{24}\) Longva, p.172

\(^{25}\) Longva, p.175

\(^{26}\) Hennink et al., p.110.

\(^{27}\) Hennink et. al., pp.118-119
Conversely, the interviews with the Kuwaiti *badū* were brief and unstructured, allowing the *badū* participants to freely elaborate on the topic of *anwā’*, and at times digress, without interruption. The aim was to gain a phenomenological understanding of the folklore of *anwā’* from the Bedouin perspective; a process that entails the construction of a ‘rich detailed description of a central phenomenon’ as John Creswell explained.28 Yet due to the limited scope of this study, and subsequently the lack of prolonged personal interaction with the

---

participants, the interviews allowed me to only briefly touch the surface of the participants' anwā’ beliefs.

The Saudi participants consisted of five middle-aged anwā’ practitioners, some of which have high academic credentials, published articles, books, websites, blogs and Twitter accounts. All of the participants in this group have learned anwā’ through independent research coupled with interaction with elders, farmers or seamen. Alternatively, the Kuwaiti group consisted of four illiterate badū men, all above the age of sixty-five. Two of these badū men belong to al-‘Ajmī tribe; a well-known Bedouin tribe with a ‘whole population’ as Longva pointed out.29 The badū men’s knowledge of anwā’ is more spontaneous and reflective of their lifestyles, having ‘inherited’ this folklore from their predecessors. Although the Saudi group was more connected to technology and the internet, initial contact with them was a challenging process, mostly due to their busy schedules and their need to ‘prepare in advance’ for the interview. Conversely, access to the badū group was more natural and effortless requiring no prior appointments or preparation. The interviews were conducted over the telephone with the Saudis and over Skype with the Kuwaitis through the assistance of a third party. After a brief introduction of the purpose of my research, as advised by Hennink et al., written consents were sought from the Saudi group, while verbal consents were regarded as adequate in the case of the illiterate Kuwaiti group.30 In order to limit what Bryman termed as the ‘problem of interpretation,’ copies of the transcribed interviews were sent to the Saudi participants for their validation.31 Six out of nine of the participants permitted me to use their names. Pseudonyms are assigned for the three who wished to remain anonymous. It is important to point out that although I am a Muslim Arab conversing in a similar dialect, I regard myself as an outsider for I have not been exposed to the practice of anwā’. Therefore, in order to attain a reasonable degree of verstehen, I sought to understand this folklore through the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Following K. Haynes advice, I constantly reflected on how my presuppositions and personal interpretations are influencing and shaping the data collected.32

29 Longva, p.178
30 Hennink et al., p.71
31 Bryman, p.78
Discussion

As aforementioned, the Saudi group consisted of participants from different regions of the country; Hassan Basurrah and Abdulrazaq al-Baloushi from Jeddah, Salman Ramadan from al-Qaṭīf, Nazeeh al-Haizan from Tabūk, and Aḥmad, who chose to remain anonymous, from the central province of Saudi Arabia. Basurrah holds a PhD in Astronomy, al-Baloushi is a member of several astronomical unions and is a regular speaker at the local planetarium, Ramadan was the head of al-Qaṭīf Astronomy Society, al-Haizan is an independent researcher who published a book on anwā’ recently, whilst Aḥmad holds a high academic degree not directly related to astronomy or anwā’. On the other hand, The Kuwaiti Bedouin group consisted of Ḥamad and Manṣūr from al-‘Ajmī tribe and two other men who wished to remain anonymous. The first chose to be called Abū Mish‘al, which translates to the father of Mish‘al, whereas the other wished to use his nickname ‘al-Malik’ which literally translates to ‘the King.’

A Relationship with the Sky

While knowledge of anwā’ was natural and spontaneous in the case of the Kuwaiti Bedouins, the Saudi participants had different stories to tell about their involvement with anwā’. Observing the sky from his family’s west-facing shop in al-Taīf instigated Basurrah’s interest in astronomy, ‘I used to see a shining star in the western horizon, its altitude increasing day after day, and then it disappears. It was Venus.’ Basurrah’s curiosity in what he calls ‘historical’ astronomy was stimulated by two manuscripts from his land of origin Ḥaḍramaut in Yemen. This triggered ‘a never-ending cycle of research in historical astronomy,’ Basurrah added. Things were not as clearly set for al-Baloushi who thought that anwā’ was connected to ‘mathematical astronomy’ before realising that it ‘was connected to rainfall more than anything else.’ Describing the retired seamen of Jeddah who helped him learn about anwā’, al-Baloushi said, ‘they possessed an amazingly large amount of information on meteorological changes, connecting these to the risings of certain stars.’ A similar interaction with elderly farmers in the agricultural governorate al-Qaṭīf introduced Ramadan to the folklore of anwā’. Yet Ramadan was not interested in farming methods, ‘I wanted to learn about the names of the stars, I wanted to see the stars,’ he remarked. In the case of al-Haizan, it was a profound visual experience that triggered the process, ‘I used to contemplate the sky with its illuminating lanterns, the sky that God Almighty described saying, “And We
adorned the lower heaven with lights.”

Likewise, sunsets, sunrises and stellar configurations were what attracted Aḥmad who had ‘a very strong connection to the sky’ to the folklore of anwā’. Clearly, both Basurrah and al-Baloushi distinguished between what David A. King termed as ‘mathematic’ and ‘folkloric’ astronomy; the latter including the calendrical works on anwā’. Yet their simultaneous interest in both traditions contradicts King’s claim of the lack of interaction between the two genres. Instead, they express a fluidity in motion between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ forms of astronomy, thus validating Patrick Curry’s theory as cited by Nicholas Campion. Curry’s ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ classes of astronomy correspond to King’s ‘mathematic’ and ‘folkloric’ astronomy. Yet unlike King, Curry believed that the threshold that separates the aforementioned classes is not solidly defined, but allows for effortless motion between the genres. In contrast, al-Haizan’s perspective reveals an Islamic cosmology that views natural phenomena as ‘signs of God to be contemplated by the believers,’ as noted by Nasr. Moreover, an urge to ‘comingle’ with the sky in order to understand it, as discussed by Tim Ingold, was experienced by al-Haizan, Ramadan and Aḥmad.

**Geography and the Definition of anwā’**

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to define some astronomical terms connected to naw; the singular form of anwā’. According to Bernadette Brady, a heliacalety rising star is a star that rises at sunrise after a period of invisibility. A morning setting star on the other hand, Brady continued, is a

35 King, pp.215-218
37 Campion, *History of Western Astrology*, pp.179-180
38 Campion, *History of Western Astrology*, p.180
39 Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p.6
star that sets at sunrise but was visible during the night.\textsuperscript{42} Although medieval philologists agreed that the \textit{naw’} was a stellar phenomenon observed at sunrise, proposing a unanimous definition was a challenging task. Analysing the etymology of the word, ibn Qutayba favoured the opinion that said that the word meant to ‘heavily incline’ as opposed to ‘heavily ascend.’\textsuperscript{43} Hence, the \textit{naw’}, ibn Qutayba concluded, is the morning setting of a star the moment another star heliacally rises at the eastern horizon, the latter known as its \textit{raqīb}, or polar opposite, he added.\textsuperscript{44} The problematic definition of \textit{naw’} stems from a misunderstanding of actual stellar observation, al-Baloushi clarified, for in order to identify the \textit{naw’} you had to observe its \textit{raqīb}. On many occasions, he continued, the elevation of the land, or the proximity of the setting star to the horizon, makes it visually hard to perceive the morning setting star. Therefore, ‘you need to memorise which star precedes the setting star and which star would be transiting the midheaven, for these two are easily visible to us,’ he explained. Clearly, \textit{naw’} identification, as perceived by al-Baloushi, involves an integrated sky seen as a whole unit.

Agreeing with al-Baloushi, Ramadan’s observation of the \textit{naw’} entails a simultaneous observation of its \textit{raqīb}. However, Ramadan proposed a geographical explanation to the definition problem of \textit{anwā’}, stating that the correlation of \textit{naw’} to morning setting stars originates from Shābān in Yemen. Basurrah opined likewise, adding that the definition is ‘reversed’ in the central and northern regions of the Peninsula, where the term \textit{naw’} became associated with the heliacal rising of stars. Truly, both Aḥmad and al-Haizan, who inhabit the central and northern regions respectively, believed that \textit{naw’} referred to the heliacal rising of stars after a period of invisibility. Tribal practices of recent centuries, Aḥmad noted, indicate that the term was used to denote the heliacal rising of stars. Furthermore, the anticipation of the rising of Canopus by local tribes, al-Haizan explained, seems to support the heliacal rising definition. Indeed, the sayings of the tribesmen according to Varisco refered to heliacal risings.\textsuperscript{45} In their proverbs, the \textit{badū} of Kuwait repeatedly used the word \textit{tala’} which according to the lexicographer ibn Manẓūr (1233-1312 CE) indicates the

\textsuperscript{42} Brady, pp.6-7
\textsuperscript{43} ibn Qutayba, pp.11-13
\textsuperscript{44} ibn Qutayba, p.14
\textsuperscript{45} Varisco, ‘The Origin of the \textit{anwā’} in Arab Tradition’, p.14
rising of the ‘sun, moon and the stars.’ Talking about Pleiades, Canopus and Sirius respectively, Ḥamad pointed out, ‘al-Thurrāyā, Suḥail and al-Mīrẓam tetla’ (rise) in the summer.’ Moreover, both Ḥamad and Abū Mish’al specified that Canopus now rises on the 24th of August of the gregorian year. Obviously, Kuwait falls in the northern region of the Arabian Peninsula, and therefore their definition may be reflective of their geographical location.

**Exploring Significant Celestial Elements in anwā’**

Varisco noted that medieval Islamic textual sources unanimously identified anwā’ with lunar mansions or manāzil, and so did all of the Saudi participants. Al-Baloushi and al-Haizan opined that Pleiades in particular was the most prominent of all of the manāzil. Describing the special calendrical use of Pleiades al-Baloushi said, ‘observing the conjunction of the Moon with Pleiades on a particular day of the hijrī (lunar) month helps in inferring seasonal changes.’ Demonstrating the system in rhymed prose, al-Baloushi added, ‘they say; “a fifth day conjunction is the climax of spring.”’ Conversely, al-Haizan explained how the ‘traingular’ shape of Pleiades helped Bedouins in identifying different directions, for ‘the tip of the traingle points towards the west and the other side points towards the east.’ Both of these functions of Pleiades; calendrical and directional; had been mentioned by ibn Qutayba. Saudi ‘practitioners’ hence demonstrate what Varisco termed as a textually based reconstruction of an oral tradition which he warned against. By imposing an ‘imported model of lunar stations,’ Varisco argued, one loses the authenticity of anwā’. Also, ethnographic studies reveal that the Arabic year commences with the autumnal rains, Varisco elaborated, not with the first lunar mansion.

Nevertheless, the Saudi participants did exhibit direct practical knowledge of the system of anwā’ not solely based on textual sources. Stressing the significance of the heliacal rising of Canopus as a marker of the beginning of the Arabic pastoral cycle, al-Haizan pointed out that the star appears on

---

47 Varisco, ‘The Origin of the anwā’’, p.6
48 ibn Qutayba, p.29; pp.90-92.
51 Varisco, ‘The Origin of the anwā’ in Arab Tradition’, p.17-18
different dates of the gregorian calendar at different localities; 24th of August in Yemen, 20th of September in the central region of the Peninsula, and 27th of September in the north. These dates clearly differ than those found in the works of ibn Qutayba and al-Ajdâbî. Similarly, Ramadan demonstrated a specialised knowledge of a nautical Canopus calendar used in the south-eastern region of the Peninsula commonly known as the ‘Indian Suhaïl’. This calendar was mainly used by seamen, pearl-divers and merchants who frequently travelled to India, Ramadan clarified. Starting from the first appearance of Canopus, Ramadan explained, the year is divided into thirty-six periods called durr, each consisting of ten days. The durr periods correlated to the everyday life of a coastal community, Ramdan elaborated, for ‘it told them when to avoid swimming in the sea and when to dive for pearls.’ Similarly, mention of the ‘Indian Suhaïl’ calendar is found nowhere in medieval texts or contemporary anthropological studies.

Both Pleiades and Canopus were repeatedly mentioned by all of the badû. Trying to remember all the anwâ’ he knew, the King commented assuredly, ‘Suhaïl, indeed, it is the first of all of the stars,’ followed by the rhymed prose, ‘when Suhaïl rises, beware of water torrents.’ Reminiscing about their nomadic days, the King narrated, ‘we used to settle near water during the summer, but once Suhaïl rose we had to resettle somewhere else because flooding usually follows.’ Ḥamad mentioned a similar story connected to Canopus, ‘Glorious is God! When Suhaïl rose the water levels increased in wells, we used it as drinking water for ourselves and our animals.’ Supporting his story by the rhymed prose, ‘When Suhaïl rises, the summer bursts like a carrion,’ Ḥamad depicted how ‘the summer and its scorching heat ends after reaching its climax, it bursts, like the rotting carcass of a camel when Suhaïl rises.’ To Abû Mish’al, the appearance of Canopus signals the commencement of autumn and the end of the cultivating season, for ‘When Suhaïl appears at night, the summer is separated from winter.’ Remembering Pleiades, Manṣûr described how ‘the whole land, all the way to the horizon, became green with pasture, for when al-Thurrayâ sets al-wasm season begins.’ The autumnal rainfall which coincides with the naw’ of al-Thurrayâ, ibn Qutayba wrote, is called al-wasmî because it marks (yasimu) the land with vegetation. Varisco added that this rain is also

---

52 ibn Qutayba, pp.21-89; ibn al-Ajdâbî, pp.122-149.

53 ibn Qutayba, p.119
known as *wasm al-Thurrayā* by the ‘Arabs of Kuwait.’\(^54\) Indeed, the rhymed prose of the *badū* express an oral response to the harshness of the desert life as Grunebaum noted.\(^55\) This oral tradition also vividly depicts the ecological contexts that regulated the nomadic lives of the *badū* as al-Rashid opined.\(^56\)

*Islamic Cosmology and *anwā’*

It seems that all of the Saudi participants’ perception of *anwā’* was shaped by their personal cosmologies, and not the reverse. Al-Haizan asserted that ‘*anwā’* has no influence whatsoever on anything in the universe, for everything is ordained by God the Glorified and Exalted. The appearance of stars simply coincides with periods of rainfall.’ Ramadan agreed adding that attributing influential power to *anwā’* ‘is forbidden as in the Prophetic *ḥadīth*. When talking about *anwā’* you should say that it rained in the specific naw’ not because of the specific naw’.’ Elaborating on the cosmological significance of *anwā’,* Ḥamad said:

> When one contemplates the heavenly bodies, it surely increases one’s faith and enhances the principle of *tawhīd*; the faith in God’s unity and oneness. God, the Glorified and Exalted, said; ‘Say: “Behold all that is in the heavens and on earth”’ and ‘[they] contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth, (With the thought): “Our Lord! not for naught Hast Thou created (all) this! Glory to Thee! Give us salvation from the penalty of the Fire”’ and ‘The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed.’\(^57\)

Evidently, the views of the urbanised group, particularly al-Haizan, Ramadan and Ḥamad reflect a cosmology that stems from Islamic theological principles and confirm Sowayan’s view of the urbanised nature of religion.\(^58\) Ramadan’s view clearly mirrors ibn Qutayba’s opposition to the ‘blasphemous’ attribution of influence and power to *anwā’.\(^59\) What Nasr termed as the ‘Unity of Divine Principle’ or *tawhīd*, that outlines and underlies Islamic cosmology is explicitly expressed in Ḥamad’s response.\(^60\) Indeed, to Ḥamad, the stars of *anwā’* are ‘signs of God to be contemplated by the believers,’ as Nasr noted.\(^61\)

\(^54\) Varisco, ‘The Rain Periods in Pre-Islamic Arabia’, p.262
\(^55\) Grunebaum, p.140
\(^56\) al-Rashid, p.372
\(^58\) Saad Abdullah Sowayan, pp.47-49
\(^59\) ibn Qutayba, pp.17-19
\(^60\) Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, pp.4-5
\(^61\) Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p.6
responses of al-Haizan and Ramadan reveal the influence of an Ash’arite theology which disjoints causes and effects, as clarified by Nasr, attributing all effects to God.\textsuperscript{62} Asserting God’s omnipotence, the noted Ash’arite philosopher al-Ghazâlî (1058-1111 CE) wrote:

In our view, the connection between what is usually believed to be a cause and what is believed to be an effect is not necessary so... For instance, quenching of thirst does not imply drinking, nor satiety eating, nor burning contact with fire... The connection is based on a prior ordainment by God the Glorious.\textsuperscript{63}

In contrast, the simplicity of the badû’s faith is evident in their natural and frequent recital of the phrase, ‘Glorious is God,’ after the mention of every rhymed prose and narration of every story. When asked about the role of anwā’ in his community, Abū Mish’al casually replied, ‘it is normal to talk about the stars, they are even mentioned in the Qur’ān. They are created by our God the Great and Mighty. Our people and their predecessors recited poems about them and found their ways through them.’ In addition of being reflective of the principle of tawḥîd characteristic of Islam, Abu Mish’al’s view echoes Mathews ‘good cosmology’; bright and self-affirming.\textsuperscript{64} Additionally, the badû’s cosmology recognises that their ‘feelings, families, communities, towns and cities are part of the cosmos,’ as Campion wrote.\textsuperscript{65}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Due to the limited scope of this study, it is important to clarify that the findings discussed here are not representative of the overall situation as it pertains to the folklore of anwā’ nor could it rule out alternative explanations. Regarding the etymological problem of defining anwā’, the interviews have shown that such a definition is geography-dependant; a point not addressed by previous literature. While the southern regions of the Arabian Peninsula seem to prefer the morning setting star definition, the northern and central regions seem to favour the heliacal rising star definition. Yet in actual practice, a precise definition is irrelevant, for as Ramadan pointed out, ‘when I am not able to

\textsuperscript{62} Nasr, \textit{Islamic Studies}, 56-57
\textsuperscript{63} Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazâlî, \textit{Tahāfut Al-Falāsifah Or the Incoherence of the Philosophers}, ed. by Sulayman Dunya (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1972), p.239
\textsuperscript{64} Mathews, p.13
\textsuperscript{65} Campion, p.5
locate al-Ḍirā’ the position of Sirius helps me find it, for what we are observing is an interconnected network of stars.’

Both the semi-structured interviews with the Saudi ‘practitioners’ and the unstructured interviews with the Kuwaiti badū confirmed the absence of pagan elements in the folklore of anwā’ in its present form, hence supporting Varisco’s observation.66 However, the interviews showed that these are not resultant from a deliberate ‘Islamicization’ process by the medieval compliers of the anwā’ genre, as Varisco opined.67 Instead, this seems to have stemmed from a major cosmological transformation that mirrored a theological transformation; for as Campion wrote cosmologies are reflective of religious beliefs.68 What Nasr termed as the ‘Unity of the Divine Principle,’ known as tawḥīd, clearly underlies the cosmological views of all participants, not merely surpassing pre-Islamic beliefs, but totally negating them.69 Conversely, elements of the Greco-Islamic cosmology that was once widespread, as pointed out by Campion, seem to have no impact whatsoever on the participants’ worldviews.70

Although the Saudi participants were able to enumerate the twenty-eight lunar mansions, none of them were able to recall with ease the rhymed prose of anwā’; which they thought to be ‘out-dated’ and inapplicable. In contrast, all of the badū instinctively connected every proverb to its ‘star,’ yet all confessed that they have forgotten many other stars. Unfortunately, the folklore of anwā’ in its authentic form is dependent of the ‘faltering memories’ of the badū, as Varisco pointed out.71 The urbanisation of the Kuwaiti badū that started in the 1960s, as stated by Longva, has without doubt disconnected them from natural cycles and cosmological patterns.72 When Suhaīl and al-Thurrayā lost their significance to the Bedouin, proverbs and sayings became ‘divorced from reality,’ as Varisco wrote.73

---

66 Varisco, ‘The Origin of the anwā’ in Arab Tradition’, pp.25-28
67 Varisco, ‘The Origin of the anwā’ in Arab Tradition’, p.28
68 Campion, p.10
69 Nasr, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, p.4
70 Campion, p.180
71 Varisco, ‘The Agricultural Marker Stars’, p.132
72 Longva, pp.175-176
73 Varisco, ‘The Agricultural Marker Stars’, p.132
Bibliography

Arabic Sources:


English Sources:


---'The Rain Periods in Pre-Islamic Arabia.' *Arabica*, T.34, Fasc.2 (July, 1987): 251-266


**Images**

The papers in SPICA were written by students of the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, as partial requirement for the attainment of the degree

MA Cultural Astronomy and Astrology

offered by the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture located within the school of Archaeology, History and Anthropology.

The MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology is a unique course which deals with the ways in which human beings attribute meaning to the planets, stars and sky, and construct cosmologies which provide the basis for culture and society. There is no need to live in the UK to study this MA. Much of our work is historical but we are equally concerned with contemporary culture and lived experience. If you are interested in the way we use the sky to create meaning and significance then the Centre may be the best place for you to study. By joining the Sophia Centre you enter a community of like-minded students whose aim is to explore humanity's relationship with the cosmos.

‘The work of the Centre is as broad as possible and the MA syllabus is groundbreaking, unique and innovative. We study the many ways in which human beings endow the cosmos with value and use the sky as a theatrical backdrop to tell stories and create meaning.’

- Dr Nicholas Campion, Director of the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture.

Inquiries and further information:
Dr Nick Campion at n.campion@tsd.ac.uk.