

INTERNATIONAL SUMMER COURSE:

CULTURAL ASTRONOMIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN EUROPE

An overview of the topic since its emergence with a discussion of its definition and implications

Polish Academy of Sciences (Warsaw) in association with the Centro Interuniversitário de História das Ciências e da Tecnologia (Lisbon) and the Sophia Centre, University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

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Under the motto that the cultures of the different peoples reflect in their skies, the course will address the emerging subject area of Cultural Astronomy or Astronomy in Culture (or History of Astronomy in Culture). This is a scholarly field either underrated or hidden by the fields of the History of Astronomy, Archaeoastronomy, and Ethno-astronomy – the two latter so widespread that they have become synonymous with Cultural Astronomy (too frequently reduced to indigenous and/or pre-historical practices). Cultural astronomy focuses on how astronomical knowledge and belief influence human behaviour and social structures. The inherent interdisciplinarity (astronomy, religion, anthropology, art, architecture, medicine, literature, etc.) of any of the possible approaches to Cultural Astronomy is a challenge to the regrettable but well-established separation of the scientific and humanistic disciplines. This makes Cultural Astronomy an even more desirable and necessary borderland to explore and understand. The course will discuss the concepts of Cultural Astronomy and the manifestations and uses of astronomical knowledge in historical cultures. The discussion will consider the most common problems in the History of Astronomy but with a focus on the meaning and scope of the long, rich, and complex relationship between astronomy and culture.

With very few exceptions, most publications, syllabi, and conferences of Cultural Astronomy focus on non-European and ancient cultures, resulting in the field being very neglected regarding Europe and specific historical periods, namely, the Middle Ages and the Early-Modern Period. Is there nothing indigenous or anthropological in the individuals and groups that practiced and used astronomy in medieval and early modern Europe? Additional limitations and misunderstandings come to the study of Cultural Astronomy in Europe from two approaches: the fragmentation of the field in isolated case studies and the often reduction of Cultural Astronomy to astrology.

The course will address these gaps and limitations from different methodologies by focusing on Medieval and Early Modern Europe and its cultural forms of understanding, theorizing, and practicing astronomy between the 13th and 17th centuries.

We will explore what 'cultural' means in the astronomy practiced by astronomers in Europe during these periods. We will reflect on and discuss critical research questions about the subject of cultures and astronomy. For instance:

- a) What aspects of astronomical knowledge and practice can be considered cultural.
- b) Whether there is an overlap between the fields of the History of Astronomy and Cultural Astronomy.
- c) Why the History of Astronomy is more well-represented than Cultural Astronomy in current research and publications.
- d) How astronomy relates to society and aspects of culture such as the arts, religion, literature, and the built environment.
- e) How the study of astronomy and culture helps us understand the History of Astronomy and the history and nature of science.

We are interested in exploring all forms of Cultural Astronomy in Europe: astrological,

religious, kabbalistic, political, philosophical, heretic, etc.

By the end of this course, students will be familiar with an exciting new and genuinely interdisciplinary field. They will be able to identify and describe different manifestations of Cultural Astronomy in Europe between the 13th and 17th centuries and detect the various forms in which astronomical practice, knowledge, and beliefs relates to the attitudes and values of a period and area.