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OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

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## **"The Power of the Planets: The Social History of Astral Sciences Between East and West."**

**May 20–21, 2024**

Dipartimento di Beni Culturali - Università di Bologna (Ravenna, Italy)

Via degli Ariani, 1, 48121 Ravenna RA

Organizing committee: Prof. Antonio Panaino, Prof. Paolo Ognibene, Dr. Jeffrey Kotyk

### **Speakers:**

Mathieu Ossendrijver  
Michelle McCoy  
Garima Garg  
Stamatina Mastorakou  
Sooyeun Yang  
Martin Gansten  
Inês Bénard da Costa  
Daniel Patrick Morgan  
Luis Ribeiro  
Levente László

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### **Monday, May 20**

8:45-9:00 – Antonio Panaino: Opening Remarks

9:00-9:30 – Mathieu Ossendrijver: "The Planets in Late Babylonian Astrology."

Along with such innovations as the zodiac, mathematical astronomy, and horoscopic astrology, Late Babylonian sources (ca. 600--50 BCE) reveal important developments in the use of the planets for prognostication, and in the Babylonian understanding of the role of the planets. Compared to traditional omen divination, Late Babylonian astrology gives priority to the planets as signifiers of future events.

9:30-10:00 – Michelle McCoy: "Gao Lu (1877–1947) and the Case of the Greco-Chinese Constellations."

This talk addresses the reception of the Hellenistic constellations in China, not as a range of star groups but as a system of representation. Starting with a set of diagrams published by Gao Lu, a

Belgian-trained scientist of Republican China, I address how visual rhetoric can dramatically transform understanding of historical uranography. The case sheds light on what constitutes a system of celestial notation, the many applications of the Sinitic asterisms in premodern society, and the role of the astronomer-historian in shaping the image of the heavens.

#### **10:00-11:00 – Coffee Break**

11:00-11:30 – Garima Garg: "Karma and Indian Astrology: How Indian Astrology Spread Globally In Contemporary History."

Fate is as old as time and in every civilisation of the world, there exists an endless treasure trove of stories, rituals, and intellectual discourse that grapples with the difficulties and wonders of it. Where the Stoics coined the adage, *Amor Fati*, i.e., the love of one's fate, Hindus proclaimed *sarve karmavaśā vayam*, which means that everything takes place as one's Karma. In either case, this aspect of nature has always been seen as being so powerful that even Zeus and Shiva cannot escape it.

However, it wasn't until 20th century that Karma as a concept became embedded in astrology on a global scale. In 1893, the Indian monk Swami Vivekananda visited the U.S to deliver a groundbreaking lecture on Hinduism which led to renewed interest in Eastern spirituality in a Western world that was on the brink of a New Age spirituality itself. At this point, movements like Theosophy came into place and individuals associated with it became instrumental in developing and propagating a new form of mass astrology in the West.

It was a stark departure from the classical medieval astrology practiced in the West until The Enlightenment. For one, it focused on Sun Signs as the pathway for the evolution of soul, which is closely aligned with the ideas of Karma and reincarnation. On the other hand, it introduced outer planets like Neptune, Uranus, and Pluto which were interpreted in psycho-somatic ways, unlike anything ever before in Western astrology.

11:30-12:00 – Stamatina Mastorakou: ""Exploring Inanimate Constellations in the Ancient Night Sky."

Ancient people managed to navigate the sky by grouping the stars into recognizable formations. By the Hellenistic era, the sky was organized into 48 constellations characterized by representations of human figures, animals and inanimate objects. In this work in progress paper, I focus on the descriptions and depictions of inanimate constellations, like Crater, Triangle, Argo and Altar in Hellenistic texts and material culture. These constellations were represented in a variety of ways and were not always present in celestial globes. By examining a range of sources, such as poetry, celestial globes and artworks, I aim to identify patterns, differences and sources of inspiration across different depictions of these inanimate objects.

#### **12:00-14:30 – Lunch Break**

14:30-15:00 – Levente László: "Isaac Argyros's revisions of astrological texts."

Three Byzantine codices, copied entirely or partly by the polymath Isaac Argyros between ca. 1350 and 1380, contain revised versions of astrological treatises and compendia. These revisions are probably to be attributed to Argyros himself. In the lecture, the possible motivations for his editorial

work and its scope and main features are examined in the broader context of astrology's role in 14th-century.

15:00-15:30 – Martin Gansten: "Texts in Context: The Indian Reception of Sahl ibn Bishr."

Sahl ibn Bishr, a Persian Jew writing in Arabic in the former half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century ce, is one of the most influential medieval authors on the astral sciences both in the Arabic-speaking world and in Europe, but until quite recently nothing was known of his importance for the development of Sanskritized Perso-Arabic astrology (Tājika). This talk will explore what can be learnt about the historical circumstances of the early Indian reception of Sahl from a close reading of the recently identified manuscripts of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century *Prccchoddeśa*, a versified Sanskrit epitome of Sahl's works that may include the only surviving version of his *K. Taḥāwīl sinī l-mawālīd* (*On the Revolutions of the Years of Nativities*).

## Tuesday, May 21

9:00-9:30 – Inês Bénard da Costa: "Communication in Practice: Iberian and Indian Ocean Stellar Altitude Measurements in Comparison."

Portuguese and Indian Ocean nautical practices underwent a turning point at the end of the fifteenth century. Two groups of navigators originally trained in different world regions began to interact on a regular basis, contrasting ideas and techniques. The consequences of this encounter are visible in the way the practices developed. The sources themselves do not mention explicitly instances of circulation of knowledge, but a systematic comparison of sixteenth-century instructions and descriptions allows one to perceive the appearance of new information. This was the case of applied astronomy. Iberian ways for using the skies to either help finding direction at sea, or to mark the location of places on paper, developed to incorporate ideas already existing in Indian Ocean practice. This talk will introduce the topic of circulation of knowledge between the two star-navigation practices, trying to provide examples of information that may have circulated, and also to suggest some of processes by which it may have circulated.

9:30-10:00 – Daniel Patrick Morgan: "Omenology as choreography: remarks on the ritual nature of political action in response to eclipses in early imperial China."

Well before the first empire (221–206 b.c.), the Chinese practised a form of uranomancy, or portent astrology, so similar to what we find in Mesopotamia as to invite conjecture about their common origins. The metaphysical basis is, in short, that as the world came into being through mitosis from a state of singularity, the 'ten thousand things' on earth saw themselves reflected in the myriad forms among the stars, the strands of destiny connecting them and projecting, through sympathy, terrestrial disturbances upon the sky. Due to its modern classification as a 'pseudo-science', twentieth-century scholarship on the subject tended to focus on fakery: on political manipulations and historical fabrications. It is only in the last decade, most notably in the work of Chen Kanli, that we have begun to shift our attention to the ways in which this science was earnestly developed and integrated into classical scholarship, ethics, and ritual at the imperial court. Building upon this, I will present the results of a statistical study of imperial decrees issued in response to solar eclipses from a.d. 25 to 581. Examined *en masse*, we will see that that throne's historical words and actions are formulaic and concerned principally with virtue, lending themselves to comparison with the classical drum

ceremony held to drive away the eclipse. In other words, setting aside the questions of scepticism and belief, I suggest that we think of omens, in early imperial China, as occasions for ritual action to reinforce ethical norms.

#### **10:00-11:00 – Coffee Break**

11:00-11:30 – Luis Ribeiro: "Modernising Astrology in the East: the Jesuits and the introduction of European astrology in China and Japan."

During the seventeenth century the Jesuit missionaries promoted the dissemination of European scientific and technological knowledge in the Far East, particularly in China. Among this knowledge was astrology which was part of the mathematical studies as a practical and prognosticatory facet of astronomy. China and Japan were not unfamiliar with western forms of astrology since they had been exposed to it during the medieval period from of Indian and Arabic sources. However, these practices were overshadowed the mathematical sophistication brought by the Jesuits, who immediately attempted to oversee the astrological prognostication in China. This lecture will discuss the interest in the new European astrological methodologies and how the Jesuits became one of the main vehicle for the introduction of Early Modern astrology in China, Japan, and neighbouring territories.

11:30-12:00 – Sooyeon Yang: "Seven Star Veneration in Late Joseon Buddhism."

This research project, "Seven Star Veneration in Late Joseon Buddhism," aims to broadly examine the formation of the Seven Star Cults, which were popularly practiced in Buddhist temples during the Joseon dynasty (朝鮮: 1396-1911), primarily in the southern provinces of Korea, through an analysis that incorporates material culture. This analysis will encompass the objects of ritual "painting," the place of ritual "shrine," and the instructions and the instructions provided in the ritual publications. Previous research has predominantly focused on paintings within the context of Buddhist art history. Parts of the ritual manual are often quoted in these studies to present the appearance of Buddhist and Daoist Seven Star divinities. Although the three materials used in the ritual may not necessarily have been produced simultaneously, they are requirements to perform the ritual. Thus, in this presentation focused comparing the quantity and context of the ritual manual publication in geographical and chronological variations to review the Buddhist ritual culture in late Joseon period (17<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century), along with the multifaceted characteristics of the Seven Star Cult that has been developed through the localization process, by briefly examining these three elements together.

12:00-12:30 – Jeffrey Kotyk: "The Seven-Day Week in Tang China: Was it Astrology?"

The seven-day week appears in China in the eighth century following the introduction of Indian astrology, but it was used strictly for the purposes of fortune telling and hemereology, rather than timekeeping. Diverse groups of non-Chinese people also observed the week in China, including the Syriac Church. This presentation will ask whether we can really qualify the seven-day week as "astrology" and whether it was ever monopolized by astrologers.

Closing Remarks