

# CULTURE AND COSMOS

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## Editorial

This volume of *Culture and Cosmos* includes papers presented at previous Sophia Centre events. Fabio Silva's paper 'Before the Celts: Cosmology, Landscape and Folklore in Neolithic Northwest Iberia', was presented at the conference on 'Celtic Myth: Land, Sea and Skyscapes', organised jointly with Jemma Bezzant, of UWTSd's School of Archaeology, History and Anthropology, in November 2013. A further three papers have been edited from the contributions at the June 2016 Sophia Centre conference on 'Worship of the Stars: Celestial Themes in Observance and Practice of the Sacred': Julye Bidmead and Marilyn Love's 'Ištar's Journey: Above and Below' deals with the ancient world; Astrid Leimlehner's 'Ancient Deities and New Meanings: The Role of Myths in Twentieth-Century Astrology' explores psychological astrology in Germany in the 1920s through a single case study, the work of Olga von Ungern-Sternberg, one of Germany's first female physicians and Jungian psychotherapists; and Reinhard Mussik's 'Contemporary Online Solstice Celebrations at Prehistoric Sites' is an ethnographic investigation of the contemporary use of ancient sites with archaeoastronomical significance. All three papers concern myth, its meaning and reception. Lastly, Helena Avelar de Carvalho's paper on 'Astrology and Sarcasm in Three Medieval Portuguese Songs of Mockery', reveals a largely unknown genre of astrological literature. We are pleased that two of the papers, those of Astrid Leimlehner and Reinhard Mussik, are developed from work completed for the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology.

### **Astrology and the Millennials**

Astrology's contemporary popularity once again became a media story in January 2018 when the *New York Times* published a New Year story by Amanda Hess. Hess wrote that

I think the astrology boomlet owes as much to the dynamics of the modern internet as it does to any sort of cosmic significance about the millennial's place in the universe. Astrology checks several boxes for viral-happy content: It provides an easy framework for endlessly personalized material, targets women and accesses '90s nostalgia. It's the cosmic BuzzFeed quiz.<sup>1</sup>

The notion that astrology has a particular appeal for millennials – the generation supposedly born from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s/early 2000s – hit a chord and produced a spate of other stories, all seeking to answer the question 'why' astrology appeals more to millennials than previous generations.<sup>2</sup> The heading to Hannah Rogers' article in the *Times* referred to 'Crystals, psychics and gongs – it's my bonkers generation'.<sup>3</sup> The obvious problem with such generalisations is that there is no research to support the proposition that millennials are more interested in astrology

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<sup>1</sup> Amanda Hess 'How Astrology Took Over the Internet', *New York Times*, Jan. 1, 2018,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/01/arts/how-astrology-took-over-the-internet.html> [Accessed 26 Feb 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Julie Beck, 'The New Age of Astrology', *The Atlantic*, 16 January 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/01/the-new-age-of-astrology/550034/>[Accessed 26 Feb 2018]; 'For Millennials, Astrology Is On The Rise', WBUR-FM Radio, Boston, January 18, 2018,

<http://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2018/01/18/for-millennials-astrology-is-on-the-rise> [Accessed 26 Feb 2018]; Hannah Rogers, 'Help! My generation's gone hippy'. *The Guardian*, 17 March 2018, *Body and Soul*, p. 3.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/help-my-generations-gone-hippy-hannah-rogers-24-on-mindful-millennials-q6x26v678>; Wilder Davies, 'Mercury Is Entering Retrograde Again. This Is Why So Many People Care', *Time*, 22 March 2018. <http://time.com/5207161/mercury-retrograde-astrology-history/> [accessed 1 July 2018].

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Rogers, 'Help! My generation's gone hippy. Hannah Rogers, 24, on mindful millennials', *The Times*, 17 March 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/help-my-generations-gone-hippy-hannah-rogers-24-on-mindful-millennials-q6x26v678> [accessed 1 July 2018].

than any previous generation, so to ask 'why' they are more interested in astrology is somewhat premature. We can, however, identify a shift caused by technology: just as the introduction of printing by moveable type in the fifteenth century facilitated the production of almanacs, and the application of taped-phone-message technology in the late 1980s ratcheted up promotion of Sun-sign astrology, so the world-wide-web and social media allow more astrologers to reach a greater audience with an astrology that normalizes the use of Moon-signs and concepts such as Mercury-retrograde, in addition to Sun-signs.

It is likely that the new technology hasn't created a new interest in astrology, but instead feeds an existing one. There is then no need to explain why there is a boom in astrology by searching for qualities in the millennial generation which may not exist. There is a surely a case here for some qualitative research: anthropologists please take note.

### **Developments in Cultural Astronomy**

It is very welcome news that the International Astronomy Union has now set up a Working Group for Archaeoastronomy and Astronomy in Culture, with Steven R. Gullberg (Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Oklahoma) as its Chair. The Group will be meeting at the IAU's congress in Vienna in August, prior to the annual conference of SEAC (The European Society for Astronomy in Culture) conference in Graz.

Nicholas Champion,  
Associate Professor in Cosmology and Culture,  
Principal Lecturer, Faculty of Humanities and the Performing Arts,  
University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

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