

RB4014: Research Methods

2020

Assessment Cover Sheet for the Dissertation Proposal

Assessment Due Date: 7th May 2020

Please complete the following

I confirm that this assignment which I have submitted is all my own work and the source of any information or material I have used (including the internet) has been fully identified and properly acknowledged as required in the school guidelines I have received.

Module Tutor	Dr. Caroline Blunt
Student Number	G20698339
Word Count	1,496 words

Do the interactions between astronomy and religion beginning from prehistory form a distinct religious tradition? A dissertation proposal.

Background and rationale

Since the formal academic study of religion commenced in the 19th century with scholars like Friedrich Max Müller (Abraham & Hancock, 2020), religions have been neatly categorised into three traditions; Abrahamic, Dharmic and Taoic (NowThis World, 2015). However, ignited by my personal interest in both astronomy and religion, I have realised that a fourth tradition exists that has not yet been formally accepted into academic nomenclature. This unestablished tradition of religion is characterised by the observation and worship of, devotion to, and divination by, the stars (Irvin & Rutajit, 2006).

To acknowledge the existence of an entire religious tradition will clarify and affirm the central role of astronomy in the development of world religion, a role that has been undermined by established religions throughout the centuries (Martínez, 2019, p372-375; Valentinuzzi, 2019, p23-27). As such, these religious institutions have acted as knowledge gatekeepers. However, following on from the legacy of the Enlightenment, the freedoms it brought to scholarship and the development of the academic study of religion in the 19th and 20th centuries, now is perhaps the best time to propose the validity of a religious tradition based on astronomy. In turn, I propose that the historical background of astronomy and religion, particularly focusing on their prehistoric origins, need to be explored. Firstly, I feel that it is important to demonstrate creativity and my passion for this research area by introducing this collection of religions as the Astronic tradition. Proving the validity of this tradition will act as the nucleus of my dissertation, but explaining the reasons for studying this area will further illuminate the subject.

My focus on this area was initially sparked by my interest in astronomy and religion, particularly due to my own personal beliefs. After investigating the current body of literature, there is a lack of specificity to the history of astronomy and religion, particularly from religious scholars. At present, the scholarship in this area of research is certainly dispersed across disciplines, hence the importance of my holistic approach to bring these dispersed works together when and where they become relevant. I also have ambitions that my work will ignite scholars of religion to research this area in the future to provide further testament to the Astronic tradition's historicity. Furthermore, another macro-level reason for my choosing of this topic involves the ever-growing role of space exploration in society lead by entrepreneurs like Elon Musk, thus highlighting the need for greater comprehension of humanity's religious connections to the stars. This involves establishing a coherent history for humanity's religio-philosophical interactions with outer space and how the future of humanity in space will alter the religious landscape. Having now understood my rationale, it is essential that I explain how I intend to achieve my aims.

Methodology

To examine whether astronomical religions do constitute their own religious tradition, it will be important to explain what a religious tradition is (Adams, 2018). Building on these theoretical foundations, a historical account for astronomy and religion will be constructed. To achieve such an account, I will draw from different disciplines, namely archaeology, archaeoastronomy, anthropology and comparative religion, thus my methodology remains multi-disciplinary by its nature. A multi-disciplinary approach is essential for my dissertation. Several disciplines are converging in my topic, each of which possesses a specific role in my overall theory. Furthermore, it is important to undertake a multi-disciplinary approach to truly capture the essence of my topic as one which resides at the crossroads between astronomy, archaeology, religion and anthropology. The multi-disciplinary approach will also be used to provide the necessary evidence from across disciplines to support my key arguments. Combining multiple disciplines together additionally allows for greater depth and breadth in the research as certain disciplines will highlight areas of the subject that others are not able to.

However, the fact that my work is dependent upon secondary sources does raise the issue of credibility. In order to convince the academic community of the Astronic tradition's validity, a multitude of sources from credible writers will be gathered. The issue arises in the fact that to draw my historical account, I will need to establish an interpretation of archaeological findings. This interpretative basis could lead to weaker areas in my work's credibility, especially if I am linking neutral archaeological findings to suit my historical narrative. Another issue with my dependence on secondary sources is that the biases and possible inconsistencies in those sources mean that the validity of my own work may suffer as a consequence. The outdatedness of some sources and the relatively low frequency of current research being conducted in this area is another aspect of concern which further highlights the need for new primary research to be conducted.

Nevertheless, to achieve my aims, I will employ historical revisionism which is a historiographical method used for the purpose of re-interpreting and adding to an historical account (Krasner, 2019, p15). In this case, the historical revisionism method will focus on the history of astronomy and religion and as a byproduct, the origins of religion. Historical revisionism, in the context of my dissertation, will provide a holistic approach to the historical account of astronomy and religion by not only providing the re-interpretation itself, but also a critical analysis. Such an analysis will serve to critically discuss and evaluate the validity of the historical re-interpretation. In addition, it will allow me to provide commentary on how the historical account links directly to the aims of the dissertation. Demonstrating the three main section headings for my dissertation will provide an insight into how I see the structure of my dissertation coming together. This particular structure and order are integral to the dissertation's methodology in providing a sequence of investigations beginning with what constitutes a religious tradition which will then form the rationale for the historical account and as a result, will culminate to the final critical discussion.

Indicative chapter headings

I have chosen three major chapter headings that will provide structure to my work. The first of these will be titled *Traditions of Religion*. This is the section of my dissertation that will precede the historical account and will set the theoretical foundations by exploring what a religious tradition is through the identification of key characteristics according to contemporary consensus. In turn, making clear what constitutes a religious tradition will serve the basis of my historical account.

The second major chapter heading of my dissertation will be *Historiography of an Astronic Tradition*. This section will constitute the main part of the dissertation and will consist of an historical account for the interactions between astronomy and religion. As such, a particular focus will be placed on providing evidence for the prehistoric origins of the tradition from a number of disciplines including archaeology, Palaeolithic anthropology and archaeoastronomy.

The third main heading will be the *Critical Analysis of an Astronic Tradition* which will serve as a critical evaluation to the historical account. Underpinning and intertwined throughout each of these sections will be an extensive multi-disciplinary bibliography providing evidence to the key points made in the historical narrative.

Indicative bibliography

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of my dissertation topic, my bibliography is divisible into three branches of knowledge: archaeology, comparative religion, and archaeoastronomy. A number of themes will be addressed in my work, mainly linking the origins of religion to early humanity's concern for the night sky so as to say that the astronomical world was a source of religious ideas which in turn formed the basis of the Astronic tradition (Culotta, 2009, p784-787). Beyond this, another important theme will convey how simplistic religious ideas regarding the night sky developed over millennia to form complex belief systems and mythologies, an example of which is the Cosmic Hunt myth (d'Huy, 2013, p93-106). Such lore will be used to demonstrate not only the conceptual development of religious ideas in relation to the stars, but the transmission of such

ideas across continents. Finally, how astronomy and religion coincided during prehistoric human settlements stands as another key theme, particularly focusing on the role of astronomy in the development of early agriculture and how this led to the development of proto-religious beliefs regarding the night sky.

Archaeology:

Ballhausen, L. E. (1940). Astronomy and religion. *Popular Astronomy*. 48 (1), p418-426.

Fitzgerald, A. P. (1951). Some Aspects of Primitive Astronomy. *Irish Astronomical Journal*. 1 (7), p197-212.

Makemson, M. W. (1954). Astronomy in Primitive Religion. *Journal of Bible and Religion*. 22 (3), p163-171.

Archaeoastronomy:

Hoskin, M (1996). *Cambridge Illustrated History of Astronomy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p2-49.

Magli, G (2016). *Archaeoastronomy: Introduction to the Science of Stars and Stones*. New York: Springer International Publishing.

Ruggles, C (2014). *Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy*. New York: Springer-Verlag New York.

Comparative religion:

Hanegraaff, W. J. (1996). *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*. Amsterdam: Brill. p445.

Sharpe, E. J. (1986). *Comparative Religion: A History*. London: Bristol Classical Press.

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- Krasner, B (2019). *Historical Revisionism*. New York: Greenhaven Publishing LLC. p15.
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- Martínez, A. A.. (2019). Burned alive: Giordano Bruno, Galileo and the Inquisition. *Annals of Science*. 76 (3-4), p372-375.
- McCluskey, S. C. (2014). Astronomy in the Service of Christianity. In: Ruggles, C *Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy*. New York: Springer. p165-179.
- NowThis World. (2015). *What Is The World's Most Peaceful Religion?*. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0W-a8Ux0Do>. Last accessed 31st March 2020.

Petzinger, G. V. (2016). *The First Signs: Unlocking the Mysteries of the World's Oldest Symbols*. New York: Atria Books. p229.

Ruggles, C (2005). *Ancient Astronomy: An Encyclopedia of Cosmologies and Myth*. California: ABC Clio.

Ruggles, C (2014). *Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy*. New York: Springer-Verlag New York.

Sharpe, E. J. (1986). *Comparative Religion: A History*. London: Bristol Classical Press.

Valentinuzzi, M. E. (2019). Giordano Bruno: Expander of the Copernican Universe. *IEEE Pulse*. 10 (5), p23-27.