

MA Cultural Astronomy and Astrology

Paper for the Research Methods Module

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Student number: 028355

Essay title:

Do modern Pagans use Astrology ?

*'Astrology and magik are links between universal forces and earthy experience. Like myth, mediation, and art they provide windows through which we can glimpse the Divine and see its hand shaping the manifest world - Skye Alexander.'*¹

Introduction:

In this qualitative research paper it could be considered that I have taken an anthropological approach as the subject is initially explored through the lens of my own experiences. An investigation is then undertaken, exploring the question through relatively recent literature and the direct reports of other's experiences through the medium of a questionnaire.

At the time of writing, June 2003, it appears there is a general consensus within the academic community that astrology is a subject/art/science/working tool that plays no part in Pagan practise in modern Britain.² It would seem the popular view (in academia) is that astrology is a subject that might probably be used by followers of new age philosophies, though it is more likely that astrology is practiced by a relatively small number of devotees to the subject. But, is this viewpoint actually the case ?

If the matter were to be judged from my own personal experiences, then the answer would be a resounding 'no'. Since my experience of this issue has been somewhat different, I think it would be most apt to begin by stating my own philosophical orientation and experiences of Paganism and astrology before moving on to the findings of the research. I am taking this approach in order to provide a background to the reason the question came into being.

I entered the field of modern Paganism at the age of eighteen in the early 1980s, at a time shortly before the widespread emergence of new age shops, and before there was such an easy access to a wide range of books on such subjects as Paganism, Witchcraft, Astrology, Esoteric Tradition and New Age beliefs and practices. At that time, information on all of these subjects had to be sought after with some effort on the part of the querant. The challenge was further added to as, socially, there was a general atmosphere of unacceptability attached to these subjects. The air of a need for secrecy and for information to be passed only to a select few was, however, about to change.

Over the last two decades I have noticed a considerable sociological change, both within the arena of modern Paganism as well as in society's attitude towards these issues. Not only are there shops selling the books, tapes and ritual paraphernalia established in the high streets of many towns and cities, the ideas and concepts of these unconventional philosophies have now become more mainstream and socially acceptable: from green ecology issues and readily available non-animal tested products to accountants placing healing crystals on their desks in the office and managers fire-walking for the benefit of their team unity, career and personal development.

During the last two decades astrology has become more accessible, thanks to the introduction of astrological software in the late 1980s and now, the internet. Popular bookshops stock planetary ephemeris and an enquirer can gain access to the data of planetary motion on-line.

This change in the accessibility of astrological information, with technology taking care of the seemingly complex calculations would, one might think, open the realm of astrology to a greater number of people than has been possible before: the precise timing for the most appropriate moment for the commencement of ceremonies and rituals is now easier to determine than possibly at any other point in history. It could be said that it would be reasonable to make the assumption that these advances in technology, and the subsequent instant availability of information, would be very attractive to those that follow the philosophical pathways of Paganism.

This isn't, however, always the case. To the novice of a Pagan or new age persuasion, the sometimes daunting array of mathematical procedures that accompany astrology can serve to obscure the use of intuition in the art of interpretation and, having become disillusioned at how 'scientific and un-spiritual' the subject seems³, the novice can turn away from an insightful tool that can greatly enhance any ritualistic or ceremonial work they undertake, as well as provide a rich insight into the dynamics of human nature and our relationship with the cosmos.

Occasionally I have found myself in conversation with followers of both New Age and Pagan pathways who had little or no interest in astrology. However, the majority of people I have come into contact with, especially those actively involved in the Craft⁴ have had at least a basic general knowledge of astrology and the symbolic meanings of planets and signs of the Zodiac.

In the Stellar Religions lecture on Pagan Cosmology by Andy Letcher at Bath Spa University, 31st March 2003, distinctions were made between differing forms of Paganism. Once again, the general consensus was that astrology played no part in the ceremonial or ritual practices of any of these branches of Paganism.

It was suggested these branches are:

k Witchcraft (often referred to as The Craft):

Hereditary Witchcraft

Traditional Witchcraft

Wicca

k Druidry

k Northern Tradition

k Shamanism and Neo-Shamanism

k Goddess Spirituality

k Radical Eco-Paganism

k Folk Paganism

I found the suggestion that none of the aforementioned branches of Witchcraft utilised astrology in their rituals or ceremonies contrasted very starkly with my own experiences. Upon asking for further information regarding astrology, the name of an additional branch of Paganism was introduced; that of High Magik. Practitioners of High Magik regard time, and the timing of ritual, to be of vital importance, almost treating time itself as an integral component of ritual. It is here that 'the moment' becomes a magikal tool, and the moment is a sacred space as well as the geographical positioning of the temple within which the work is to undertaken.

In the coven in which I had undertaken my training and initiation through my twenties this reverent approach to time and its significance was proffered as a fundamental part of the working practice and philosophy of the Craft. In the light of the pathway called High Magik being introduced to me, the arena of the Craft I learned and developed in now appears to be a rather eclectic mix of philosophies and viewpoints that work very well together. If I were to nail my philosophical colours to the mast I would have to say that my Astrological Tree often bears New Age and Theosophical fruits and flowers, while it branches into most forms of Modern Applied Psychology. Its Pagan roots, however, are planted firmly in the soil of Hereditary Traditional Witchcraft and it takes the timing of its seasons from the guiding principles of High Magik.

An example of bringing many of these viewpoints together in a single ritual occurred in August 1997. From an astrological perspective of the new age, the planet Uranus (representing the dawning new age) was placed in its own sign of Aquarius⁵ (the sign of the new age⁶), and Neptune

(the planet associated with Pisces - the sign of the old age) was about to join Uranus. It seemed as if a highly significant moment was about to occur. In January 1998 the Planet representing the old age would join the planet representing the new age, in the sign of the new age.

From a more traditional viewpoint, a full Moon is a time of the culmination of power⁷, and harvest time is also a culmination: a conclusion of that annual cycle's work and the Earth's productive bounty.

On the night of the full Moon, as mother nature was coming to bloom in readiness of harvest, I, along with eleven others, enjoyed two hours of private time in the very centre of Stonehenge long after sunset, by special arrangement. As the bright Moon rose above the great stone trilithons⁸ in a clear and starlit sky, a ceremony was performed by six males and six females: with each of the differing Sun signs of all twelve participants representing the cycle of the twelve signs of the Zodiac.

Working and living as if one is on the Theosophical and New Age evolutionary pathway of ascension to higher planes⁹ while simultaneously wanting to return to the Earth, maybe one day as an ascended enlightened Soul, seems perfectly natural and ideologically ecological for me. If one Pagan can worship both the Earth and the heavens at the same time and work with the elements of nature and the timing and cycles revealed in the cosmos, then might it be possible for others to also work in the same way ?

Do modern Pagans use astrology ?

In surveying recent Pagan literature: spell books, Wiccan philosophy, and other works discussing healing and the healing properties of plants, herbs and flower essences, there is much to be found in answer to the question. This in itself could be seen to imply that there is a market, and therefore a collective demand, for such information.

In *Magickal Astrology*, Sky Alexander proposes a definition of Magik and then proceeds to illustrate how both astrology and magik are 'entwined'.

"Every intentional act is a magical act" – Aleister Crowley

In essence, magik is the process of consciously creating circumstances by manipulating energy. From the magician's point of view, there's no such thing as luck - we make our own "luck". Ceremonial magik, shamanism, creative visualization, ecstatic sex, chanting, and feng shui are all types of magik, and there are many others. Despite differences in their outer forms, all have one thing in common: they focus the magician's intent, strengthening his or her ability to direct natural energies in order to produce a desired effect. Will is the power behind magik-magik is willed action.¹⁰

Most of us living in the 21st century have become detached from the natural and cosmic forces that surrounded us and permeate our very existence. However, we need only look beneath the surface to see astrology's influence mirrored in virtually every facet of life here on earth, such as architecture, language, medicine, music, art, and mathematics.

This is because our ancestors envisioned heaven and earth as entwined, like the warp and woof threads in a piece of cloth, rather than as separate layers of existence the way we do today. In their conception of the universe, the actions of the celestial bodies influenced everything that happened on this planet. Not only were they aware that the moon's phases affected the tides and that the earth's changing relationship to the sun brought about the seasons, they believed "sprit", or divine energy, penetrated everything on earth and that physical existence was animated by metaphysical forces.¹¹

Knowing that prayer, wishing on a star¹², creative visualisation and spell-working all produce results at some time or another is one thing. To propose that the timing of such an activity is in some way essential to its success and that the timing can only be determined from understanding the symbolic associations, and movements, of planets via the study of astrology, is another thing altogether. Yet, as the findings in this study show, this is exactly what many Pagans still do.

Jan Spiller writes in *New Moon Astrology*:

Timing is everything. When we plant seeds in the springtime, the laws of nature bring about bountiful crop in the fall. The same seeds planted in a winter snowstorm will likely not yield results, or the results may require much more hard work and be straggly compared to seeds planted at the appropriate time. Likewise, being aware of timing when making wishes is also important. Just as the New Moon is fruitful for starting material ventures, it is also a potent time for making wishes that simulate new beginnings in our lives.

Vivianne Crowley reports in *Ways of Wicca* that, 'Experienced astrologers will calculate to the exact minute the right time to carry out a magical act so to best harness particular planetary energies.'¹³ She then asserts that the meticulous use of astrology and precise timing is not essential, 'This need not concern us here, but we can work with the planetary energies by knowing their attributes and doing our magic on the day of the week that is most appropriate.'¹⁴

There are numerous books that feature the correlation of days of the week being related to planets. The following page details the most common correlations.

This correlation usually follows the pattern of:

Sunday - The Sun
Monday - The Moon
Tuesday - Mars
Wednesday - Mercury
Thursday - Jupiter
Friday - Venus
Saturday - Saturn

Correlations can be found for planets and signs of the zodiac with a diverse range of 'tools' of the Craft. There are correlations, for example, with:

| | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| The seven spiritual planes ¹⁵ | Fabrics and materials ¹⁶ |
| Herbs, flowers and trees ¹⁷ | Essential Oils ¹⁸ |

Correlations with astrology have also broadened the craft of certain magikal practices, such as gaining a deeper insight into the Major Arcana of the Tarot to the making of talismans and magikal squares.

In *How to Make and Use Talismans*, Dr Francis Israel Regardie writes:

The magik squares of the planets are an important part of the science of talismanic structure. To each planet belongs, first, the number of the *Sephira*¹⁹ to which it corresponds; and secondarily, the other numbers which are the sum of the various horizontal and vertical rows on the square.

For example, Saturn is a planetary symbol of *Binah*, the third *Sephira* on the Qabalistic Tree of life. Thus, the square of Saturn has three compartments each way, and in each sub-division is a number of its square - $3 \times 3 = 9$, so that all the columns add up to 15 each way, and the three columns together total 45.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | 9 | 2 |
| 3 | 5 | 7 |
| 8 | 1 | 6 |

From chakras to colours to musical notes and numbers, people have correlated and cross-referenced astrology with the tools and working structures of Paganism.

Janet & Stewart Farrar and Gavin Bone state in *The Healing Craft*:

Mysticism continued to play an important part in the medical profession until the seventeenth-century, and astrology was widely accepted as a recognized form of diagnosis. The use of the zodiac and planets to codify parts of the body, herbs, and pharmaceutical preparations was used

by the medical profession as late as the eighteenth-century. Typical examples of the use of astrological correspondence include the famous woodcuts attributing the zodiac to areas of the body. Even *Culpeper's Complete Herbal*, which uses planetary and zodiacal correspondences, was still considered one of the most important works on the subject until as late as the beginning of the nineteenth-century by many doctors. Many of the herbs were associated with astrological symbols for very simple reasons. For example, the marigold is attributed to the sun simply because of its appearance. Others were related because of their physical action on the body; for example, a herb related to easing the pains of labour would be attributed to Cancer. Complementary therapists, as well as many of today's pagans, continue to use astrological correspondence.²⁰

From taking into account the phase of the Moon, to being specific regarding the day of the week that a particular magikal work is to be undertaken, the next step is to bear in mind the hour that the rite is to be performed.

The use of planetary hours is fairly well documented in current literature as well as in more traditional works.

Skye Alexander explains in *Magickal Astrology* :

Each planet or luminary also rules certain hours of the day. The period between sunset and sunrise is divided into 12 equal portions, as is the period between sunrise and sunset. (For ease of calculation, some people simply align the planets with the hours according to clock time.) The first “hour” of the day is governed by the heavenly body that rules the day: the sun on Sunday, the moon on Monday, and so forth. Subsequent hours are presided over in the following sequence: Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars and the cycle continues in this sequence until the next sunrise.

For example, on Monday, the Moon rules the first hour, Saturn the second, Jupiter the third, and so on. On Thursday, Jupiter’s influence dominates during the first hour, Mars during the second, the Sun’s during the third and so on.

This system of division allows you to refine your magikal work and blend planetary energies to suit your purposes. Many spells and rituals incorporate qualities of more than one heavenly body; for instance, both Venus and Jupiter can enhance prosperity spells. Therefore, you could perform a money spell during the fourth hour on Thursday or the fifth hour on Friday in order to take advantage of the favourable energies of both planets. A spell to strengthen a marriage could benefit from combining the energies of Venus and the

moon; a spell to increase sexual passion in a love relationship might be done under the influences of both Venus and Mars.

See table on page 16.

Table of Planetary Hours

| | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|-----------|---------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1st Hour | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn |
| 2nd Hour | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter |
| 3rd Hour | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars |
| 4th Hour | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun |
| 5th Hour | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus |
| 6th Hour | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury |
| 7th Hour | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon |
| 8th Hour | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn |
| 9th Hour | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter |
| 10th Hour | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars |
| 11th Hour | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun |
| 12th Hour | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus |

By “mixing and matching” celestial energies, you can draw upon whatever forces you need. First determine which of the heavenly bodies relate(s) to your intention. Generally speaking, you’ll want to consider the sun’s sign position as most important, then the moon’s phase and sign, then the day of the week, then the planetary hour. However, if you are doing a fertility spell, the Moon’s position will take precedence. If you are doing magik to get a job while the sun is in Aquarius and time is a factor, you might decide to overrule the sun’s sign (unless the job you’re seeking is in an Aquarian field, such as computers, aviation, or astrology) and perform a spell or ritual during the waxing moon, on Sunday, during the sixth (Jupiter’s) hour of the day.

As you become more familiar with the basic natures of the planets and luminaries, as well as the signs they rule, you’ll be able to design spells and rituals that successfully utilize cosmic energies to produce positive results.²¹

I’d like to draw this part of the paper to a close by offering the experiences of the author Silver Ravenwolf in the book *To Ride a Silver Broomstick*:

At first glance, astrological correspondences and their use in spells and working ritual boggle the mind. Astrological correspondences are important to a new Witch. By the correct use of planetary hours, days and moon phases, a beginning Witch has a far greater chance of obtaining what he/she desires than if they did not use these tools. Once you have trained yourself to the point where you have complete control of your powers, successful spell casting and working rituals can be achieved at almost any time.

Many Witches will tell you that “you don’t really need that stuff”. They are right in most cases; you don’t if your height of need matches your emotion and you are focused on what you want. I say this because I’ve cast spells for years without worrying about astrological correspondences, but I have had a better success rate since I began incorporating them into my workings.²²

It would be easy to conclude here that if the purpose of magik is to achieve a specific goal or result, then the ritual one undertakes would be relevant to that objective and one would endeavour to make use of whatever implements or tools as are available.

There is, however, sometimes a distinctive difference between how a belief system, philosophy, diet, religion, or methodology is presented by scholars and in the written word, and how it is implemented, performed or received ‘on the ground’. The next stage in this investigation involves direct

contact with those who may, or may not, use astrology as a part of their ritual and ceremonial practice. This is an opportunity for modern Pagans to reveal whether or not they make use of astrology, and for those who live outside of Paganism to gain more understanding of their world.

To unearth the ways in which Pagans use astrology without influencing the outcome with leading questions, I devised a questionnaire that contained open questions. The key points I was looking for were the use of planetary hours and the current perception of astrology's impact on our society and culture.

Questionnaires were sent via e-mail to two distinctive groups of Pagans: One set went to a High Priestess involved in the Pagan Federation, and another to a Druidic Priestess.

Two control groups were also involved, bringing the use of astrology in ritual practise into a sharper contrast with mainstream society, and indeed, with mainstream astrology.

The two control groups were a Wiltshire group of yoga students, and a small number of accountants from a household-name communications company.

Thirty-one replies were received in total, and although statistically there are some interesting conclusions to be drawn, it is within the comments and beliefs of the participants that a valuable insight can be gained into how modern Pagans currently make use of astrology and to what extent astrology has filtered into the mainstream culture of our society.

The more statistical approach will be addressed first.

A statistical perspective

Knowing that the Pagan culture within which the e-mail was going to be circulated had a historical mistrust of authority, borne from a still lingering collective memory of persecution, the e-mail was sent with a covering note, providing a background and context for the purpose of the questionnaire. It began a little informally and read:

Hi,

I wondered if you would be willing to take part in a research project involved in establishing the credibility of the cultural, philosophical and practical applications of Astrology in the British University system at post-graduate level.

I am currently a student on the first course in Astrology to be held in a British University since 1671. Astrology has returned home to its rightful place at the heart of learning.

All of us taking part on this course, from the tutors to the students to the sponsors, all consider this to be a unique opportunity for us to bring Astrology back into common

acceptance in the academic world of mainstream education. As such, the initial task is to establish, from the 'establishment's point of view' the existence and viability of Astrology: first of all from a sociological perspective, providing evidence of its impact on our modern culture.

To this end I have devised a questionnaire that explores not just what people think about Astrology, it also looks at how people might make use of Astrology and in what context/s.

There is little information about how modern Pagans view, or use Astrology and this paper will open a door to establish this - and provide a resource for those wishing to further this work in the future, not only with regards to Astrology but also in giving a glimpse of modern Pagan practice in Britain.

Thank you for your time in considering participating in my research paper.

Initially, the participants were invited to identify their philosophical/religious orientation. A short 'menu' was offered from which they could choose or be prompted to more clearly state their own position. The menu offered was:

Please state, in your own words, a brief outline of your cultural/philosophical/religious direction/background:

Pagan, Druid, Health Care Professional, Complimentary Health Practitioner, Wiccan, Buddhist, Kabbalist, Follower of 'New Age' Philosophies, Christian, Yoga Practitioner Etc

For simplicity in presenting the results in a statistical way, I have grouped some of the categories together: for example, those who answered with such descriptions as Wiccan, and Pagan were placed under the identification label of Pagan. Participants who listed a variety of complimentary practices and stated that they looked to a 'higher source/being' were included under the heading of 'New Age'. That is, with the exception of one individual who identified herself as a 'Pagan New Age Muslim, who is interested in Buddhist philosophies'. This person was placed in a category all of her own, as it could be revealing to distinguish her view point from others of a more New Age persuasion. Others who stood alone were a Druid, a Theosophist, a Reform Jew and an Atheist. Only one astrologer defined her orientation as 'professional', avoiding any reference to a religious or philosophical position.

Please refer to table on page 23.

The religious and philosophical positions of the participants:

| Groups approached for survey in this study | Astrologer Practitioner or student | Pagan | Yoga Student | Accountant |
|--|------------------------------------|-------|--------------|------------|
| Number of participants | 10 | 9 | 8 | 4 |
| Identified beliefs as Pagan | | 8 | | |
| Identified beliefs as Astrologer | 1 | | | |
| Identified beliefs as New Age | 5 | | 5 | |
| Identified beliefs as Druid | | 1 | | |
| Identified beliefs as Theosophist | 1 | | | |
| Identified beliefs as New Age Pagan Muslim | 1 | | | |
| Identified beliefs as Buddhist | | | 2 | |
| Identified beliefs as Reform Jewish | 1 | | | |

| | | | | |
|--|----------|--|----------|----------|
| Identified beliefs as Christian | 1 | | 3 | 3 |
| Identified beliefs as Atheist | | | | 1 |

The philosophical question came third in the questionnaire (out of a total of nine questions) after firstly asking them to give their name for my own cataloguing purposes, and asking the area of the country they reside in so that I could keep a track of where the e-mails were circulating.

The Fourth question asked was:

What do you know of Astrology ?

This open question is designed to allow the participant to detail their level of knowledge of astrology.

The fifth question asked was:

Does Astrology have any effect on the culture of your individual lifestyle ?

Rather than ask a question to elicit the participant's awareness of astrology in society this question seeks to determine how much the participant's lifestyle is impacted by astrology.

The sixth question from the nine was:

If you make use of Astrology, in what way/s do you do this ?

The intention here is to distinguish the responses from those who merely read Sun Sign columns in the media, from those who seek a more technical or professional approach by exploring their transits and progressions, to those who make a use of astrology by determining the timing of specific and significant moments of their lives. This question is worded in such a way that the responder will consider the methodology utilised either by themselves or by the professional whos assistance they seek. The question opens with the word 'if' in order for those who have not sought to make any use of astrology to answer without experiencing any sensations of being led.

The seventh question asked was:

When would Astrology be something you turn/look to or use ?

Again, it is making use of astrology in decisions based around time that I want to further explore. This might be in the timing of events, or most probably from a Pagan perspective, the timing of ritual and ceremonies. I was also interested in how many individuals made use of astrological symbolism in rituals and magikal works through the correlations mentioned earlier in this paper or simply though the symbolic meanings attributed to the signs of the zodiac and planets.

The eighth and penultimate question was:

How would you describe your personal opinion of Astrology ?

The participant might reply here with the words, 'Astrology is an essential tool in ceremonial and magikal work', or the participant might reply with the words, 'It has no relevance in this day and age'.

The ninth and final question was:

Would you be willing to now be interviewed either by e-mail, by telephone or in person ?

It transpired that it was very fortuitous that I had thought to seek permission to ask more questions, or to clarify any given replies that were, to me, unclear. Not only did I have to cause to seek further clarity on a few returned questionnaires, there was also some ambiguity about one of the questions on the form.

Question five had caused confusion in many of the participants. On finding the question needed to be reworded in order for the responders to fully participate I reworked the question into a new form:

- a) In what ways would you say Astrology affects, or influences, our society ? How would you describe any overt, or covert, impact Astrology has on the culture of life in modern Britain ?

An overview of the final responses can be found on the following page:

The Participant's relationship with astrology:

| Stated Beliefs | Practising or Studying Astrology | Cynical about validity of Astrology | Never uses astrology | Looks at media 'star' columns | Looks at personal astrological forecasting | Uses Astrology to elect the timing of events | Uses Astrology to elect the timing of a ritual or ceremony | Uses Astrology as a part of ritual, ceremony or magikal work |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Qty: 8 Pagan | 2 | | 3 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Qty: 1 Astrologer | 1 | | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| Qty: 8 New Age | 5 | 1 | | 2 | 7 | 1 | | |
| Qty: 1 Druid | 1 | | | | 1 | | | |
| Qty: 1 Theosophist | 1 | | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| Qty: 1 New Age Pagan Muslim | 1 | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | |
| Qty: 2 Buddhist | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Qty: 1 Reform Jewish | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | |
| Qty: 7 Christian | 1 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 1 | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----|---|----|----|----|---|---|---|
| Qty: 1 Atheist | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | | |
| Total Qty: <u>31</u> | 13 | 6 | 10 | 11 | 18 | 7 | 5 | 2 |

From looking at the above table of responses some conclusions can immediately be drawn:

1. The highest number of participants who look at 'star columns' in the media are Christians.
2. The highest numbers of people who are cynical about the validity of astrology, and who never use astrology are also Christians.
3. The most popular use of astrology is that of looking at one's Transits and Progressions for the purpose of forecasting, and predicting future trends in a specific and personal sense. The highest number of people to use astrology in this way were New Age, followed closely by the Pagans.
4. Of the thirty-one participants in the survey, thirteen are either students or practitioners of astrology.
5. Of the eight Pagans who responded in the survey, two use astrology to elect the timing of events, two use astrological correlations in magikal works and three Pagans use astrology to determine the best time for rituals and ceremonies to take place.

Statistically, the control groups of the yoga students and the accountants responded in what might seem a fairly predictable manner. None of these people used astrology for ritualistic timing or for any form of forecasting in a technical and personal sense.

Participant's replies in their own words

We will now review some of the participant's replies to the questions of the survey that relate to the question 'Do modern Pagans use Astrology ?' In this final section will also explore the participants perspectives on the contemporary cultural impact, influence or place in our society. We will commence with a cultural response from Question 3.

Question 3: Please state, in your own words, a brief outline of your cultural/philosophical/religious direction/background:

Participant 17 (New Age Pagan Muslim & Astrologer):

I was born into a Muslim family and am very interested in other types of religions and philosophies, such as Buddhism, Paganism, and new age. Currently I'm working as an accountant, hopefully I'll be re training as a yoga teacher in the very near future.

Q. Does your interest in Astrology conflict with your Muslim upbringing ?

Participant 17 (New Age Pagan Muslim & Astrologer):

I haven't experienced any conflicts, partly due to the fact that many old Islamic scholars and wise men used astrology and astronomy in their works. Also because I see astrology as a philosophy/exact science rather than a religion. I'm open to learning and using anything that provides me a better understanding of the world.

Q. How would you respond to a typical challenging claim from cynical quarters that Astrology is 'just an exercise in making generalized statements that fit anybody and is only practiced by charlatans' ?

I can understand this type of response from those who haven't been to a good astrologer or even experienced it at all. I expect this type of statement to come from those who are afraid: afraid that their model and belief system could be wrong. After all one of the reasons that astrology got such a "bad press" was because the church wanted and needed to control people of the land. What better way of controlling people than by keeping from the people the tools that would allow people to gain a better understanding of the world and make better decisions for themselves. Without this in place, it allows prejudice, hatred, misunderstanding and miscommunication to become an integral part of society.

The reply from the first participant to respond in the survey revealed the very issue posed by the question this paper seeks to answer, in the question that assesses the level of Astrological knowledge in modern Paganism. At this stage in the research the answer would seem to be 'Yes'.

Question 4: What do you know of Astrology ?

Participant 1 (Pagan):

Recently carried out a workshop for a study group on Astrology in Wicca. This moved from Astrology as presented in daily papers to planetary hours etc ... use in magik ... elements ... influences etc.

This workshop took place in Manchester in 2003. To think that this workshop is a one-off could be misleading and mistaken, so the open approach of seeking to further this research by focusing on this specific issue could be very fruitful.

Participant number two provided a general overview of astrology, and made a final comment of being open to the idea of using astrology in her work.

Participant 2 (Pagan):

That it was the first study of the universe, pre-dating modern astronomy. Was regarded as a serious science and that

astrologers were consulted by statesmen, politicians, doctors etc. in former times. I understand that it became less popular as the 'scientific' age progressed and was condemned by orthodox religion. It is now regaining its status with new age thinking and more people being interested in spirituality. Some famous people consult astrologers regularly, the late Princess of Wales being a notable example. This has increased its popularity.

The moon has always been important to Wiccans and herbalists. For example, banishing spells work best when cast under a waning or dark moon, whilst creative or healing spells are usually done during the waxing moon. I had never thought to take into account the movement of the planets for my work, but it seems obvious now you mention it.

The Moon is relevant for the timing of ceremonies in many religions and cultures:

Participant 15 (Reform Jewish & Astrologer):

A little, I am aware of the houses and the planets, my rising and other planet placements though not of how this influences me. Jewish beliefs celebrate the New Moon, so I use this phase to start projects where possible. I do though believe that Astrology may be the map, which is not the journey. As I believe that we have free will, astrology could then be used for guidance.

It is in Question 5 that a more general overview of astrology's place in our culture and society is now sought. This question was re-written and re-presented to those who had agreed to participate further.

Q5. Does Astrology have any effect on the culture of your individual lifestyle ?

A direct and confident response from the Theosophical participant required a second, more elaborate, reply:

Participant 14 (Theosophical & Astrologer):

Yes

Q. In question your reply to question 5 of the questionnaire, you said, 'Yes'. In what way/s does Astrology affect your culture and lifestyle ?

Astrology is the basic tool that I use to comprehend life, the model therefore permeates my life and principles, it makes me more tolerant of how others think differently to me, it helps me to respond to external events as a spiritual model of transits i.e. to make the best of external changes.

Revised Question 5:

In what ways would you say Astrology affects, or influences our society ?
How would you describe any overt, or covert impact Astrology has on the culture of life in modern Britain ?

The replies to this question provide a insight into how some astrologers and modern Pagans experience their society's reception of their beliefs or practices:

Participant 8 (Pagan and Astrologer):

That's a big question! There is certainly an undercurrent of awareness of astrology in our society, in the way that virtually everyone knows what their Sun-sign is; this is in contrast to the way that far fewer people know what their Chinese year-sign their enneagram type is. This 'astrologic awareness' in modern Britain is, I think, worthy of a research project all on its own. Certainly, astrology (or rather, astrologic awareness) has an impact on life in general - just look at any page of personal ads and see how many mention a Sun sign. And a great many people are

ware that an astrological reading involves more than just the Sun sign. Plus, there is an awareness of the basic planetary symbolisms - Venus for love/women, Mars for war/men etc. - this again ties in with the aforementioned astrologic awareness.

Participant 11 (New Age & Astrologer):

To look at this technically – Mundane Astrology would describe this situation and is not my field. Nick Campion is the most experienced Astrologer in this area that I know. From my personal experience, most of our Society still think that Astrology has something to do with palm reading or crystal ball stuff. I was once asked “Do you believe in Mystic Meg!!” My response was “I don’t know what Mystic Meg does – but I do Astrology”.

Participant 14 (Theosophical & Astrologer):

The most obvious would be the use of astrology columns in the papers, people turn to these during stress: look at dating sites, people describe their astrology without a second thought and most people have some understanding of the characteristics of their sun sign.

Question 6 is designed to uncover the methodology being used. Are Astrologers, followers of New Age philosophies and modern Pagans only using astrology as a tool for insight and forecasting ? Or, is this great cosmic time-keeper being used to gauge the timing of when to link ourselves with the rhythms of the heavens, to link our consciousness with that of the Earth and the universal Spirit ?

Question 6: If you make use of Astrology - in what way/s do you do this ?

The Pagan participants use astrology both as a tool for the timing of important work and as a system of symbols, myth, and magikal principles that can be used as an archetypal symbolic language that resonates through 'the moment' of a magikal work, and through the correlations of the tools of the Craft.

Participant 1 (Pagan):

If considering working an important piece of magik

Participant 5 (Pagan):

I have previously used it in magical ritual. I made a talisman involving planetary symbology.

Some people seem to become emotionally 'stuck' in a habit of using astrology as decision making tool in their daily lives. The numbers of people who do this are very few, and yet obviously sufficient enough to be noticed, and commented upon by participant number 7:

Participant 7 (Pagan & Astrologer):

Looking at transits/progressions/lunation data. Unlike some though, I do not run my life by it, i.e., I am staying in bed today as Mercury is retrograde!

The practising astrologer who identified his beliefs as Christian uses astrology in a variety of ways, including electing the timing of events. It is to be noted however, that a significant difference here is that of electing the timing of ceremony or ritual with astrology. For some Pagans, the cosmos plays a part in the management of their religious practises. For the Christians, ceremonies and their timing are managed by the church, the common calendar and tradition.

Participant 16 (Christian & Astrologer):

Problem-solving by horary; weather-forecasting; election of suitable moments for important acts and decisions; life forecasting; character analysis and assessment of everyone I come in contact with; providing a perspective on history and culture; adding extra dimension to my religion.

The use of planetary hours is really as the last level of symbolism, the icing on the cake, for electional astrology. You pick a good day, good aspects, good links to your own chart etc, and then pick the hour whose ruler ties in with your purpose, and which is also dignified on the day. If you're getting married, for instance, you should try to do it at the

hour of Venus, and if poss when Venus is culminating, trine by the moon, or in Libra anyway. See? I use planetary hours when buying vehicles, buying houses, and planning weddings - including my own!

For more information regarding the use of astrology as a working tool in ritualistic practise, without leading the questioner or making any suggestions that might influence the outcome of the investigation into the question addressed by the paper, the question was asked:

Question 7: When would Astrology be something you turn/look to or use ?

Participant 5 (Pagan):

Rarely if ever. Possibly when performing experiments related to magic.

Here, we have an example of a pagan who does not use astrology, in the common terms of seeking personal insights or forecasting predictions, making use of it in his Craft practice.

It could be said that a similar response would be expected from others of a Pagan persuasion, and yet, there are those who follow other pathways that also use astrology in the timing of significant moments:

Participant 17 (New Age Pagan Muslim & Astrologer):

Q. In your reply to Question 7, 'When would Astrology be something you look to, turn to, or use ?' you stated, 'All the time'. Please elaborate on this and describe any techniques or methods you might employ.

I would look at my transit to better understand some of my life experiences and process of evolution. I'd use astrology with moon phases to find the best time to may be carry out a particular task or start something new, e.g. send out healing light, start a new course, sign a contract. I even used astrology to find the best time to get married.

And finally, some viewpoints and perceptions of astrology as a subject from those of a mostly Pagan persuasion:

Q8. How would you describe your personal opinion of Astrology ?

Participant 10 (Pagan):

Mainly not very impressed. I've taken the 'Prediction' magazine for some time and am suspicious of its claims.

Participant 18:

Absolutely fascinating. I think it is the greatest thing you can learn to discover yourself, what you can do, and also help others to do the same. Invaluable piece of knowledge (once you have it) !!

Participant 14 (Theosophical & Astrologer):

It works

Participant 16 (Christian & Astrologer):

Hopelessly biased in favour. If what you mean is 'What is your personal opinion of astrology?' then the answer is 'Indispensable: it is the mark of the considerate man (i.e. one who considers the nature and context of things rather than merely recognising them)'.

Conclusion

Do modern Pagans use astrology ?

Although the quantity of participants for the questionnaire were fairly low in number, 38% of the Pagans who responded either use astrology to time ceremonies and rituals, or use astrological symbolism and planetary correlations as a part of their Craft.

Contemporary Pagan literature found in the types of shops where Pagans are most apt to visit, such as 'The Henge Shop' in Avebury, or the those in the High Streets of Totnes or Glastonbury, advocate using astrology to time rituals and to gain more power in magikal work. Attendees of workshops in Manchester, and possibly other areas, are learning how to apply astrological lore to their developing Craft.

These findings may contradict with certain established views, and this would indicate a need for further research and study in this field.

We can draw the conclusion, from the small survey undertaken in this research paper, that the answer is 'Yes, they certainly do.

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