

SOAR Summer Research Grant Faculty Proposal

Title: "Development of Astrological Thought in the Ancient World"

Faculty Mentor: Jason Radine, Associate Professor, Department of Religion

Student: Daniel Macarro '16

Start Date: 12 May 2014

I am happy to request SOAR support to work with Daniel Macarro on his project on ancient astrology. This project developed from Daniel's own initiative, and we worked together on refining the focus of his project. Daniel is a history major, but as he has a strong interest in ancient history, he came to me for this project. He is a student in my "War and Peace in the Biblical World" class, so he has learned about my teaching in ancient studies.

Daniel's project is an interesting one which rides the intersection between history and religion, as astrology was a strong and ubiquitous part of ancient religious beliefs throughout the Near East and Mediterranean worlds. I will be able to guide through serious resources both at Reeves and available through ILL on ancient astrological beliefs, and their development from Near Eastern to Classical (Greco-Roman) environments. He has considerable prior knowledge on ancient Near Eastern and Classical religion and mythology, from a number of courses he took on the subject at the University of Pennsylvania before transferring here. So, he is well equipped to take on this particular topic. He has also demonstrated to me his ability to get work done on time, as he recently submitted a draft paper for the War and Peace class early, ahead of any of the other students. I expect to meet with him regularly over the summer to work on drafts with him and to guide him to additional resources.

Daniel and I have discussed him presenting his work at Scholars' Day, a meeting of the Religion Society student club, the History Club, and perhaps at the Undergraduate Philosophy Conference or a similar event. He is well spoken and would do well at this, in my judgment. While his interests are primarily on ancient astrology, he is interested in the parts of the world that he is because it is these parts of the world that developed the sort of astrology that appears most often in the United States, believed in by millions of Americans today. Thus, Daniel's project deals with an ancient topic of modern relevance for contemporary American life, and

thus should be of interest to students and faculty members beyond those interested in the ancient world.

Timeline

May 12: Beginning of project

May 26: Primary sources gathered and analyzed

June 9: Bibliography of secondary sources gathered and analyzed

June 23: First draft of paper due, with specific problems for further research identified.

July 7: Articles on specific problems gathered and analyzed, with additional drafts produced.

July 21: Final draft of 25 page paper complete, with smaller form for public presentation along with Powerpoint.

Application Part 3: Student Statement of Purpose

“Development of Astrological Thought in the Ancient World”

Daniel Macarro ‘16

History Major

Dr. Jason Radine, Associate Professor, Religious Studies

Start Date: May 2014, 10 weeks

One of the most ubiquitous ways the ancient world still plays as an influence in our everyday lives can be seen in any newspaper across America: the Astrology column. These twelve divisions of zodiac signs goes back to ancient Greco-Roman authors who determined the first way to systematically organize the heavens. This was not a unique idea that promulgated independently, but rather was the culmination of thousands of years of careful astronomical measurements and fastidious record taking. I want to use this grant to further investigations into the origins of our understanding of the stars and planets by approaching it from several different perspectives.

Firstly, I want to look at the technique of ancient stargazing. Indeed, it was a professional endeavor closely tied to priesthood from the earliest Sumerian scribes. Tracking the stars and their movements was also a very mathematical exercise as many of the principles we now associate with geometry were formulated there.

Secondly, this project will require me to take close examinations of the religious traditions of these people. These legends about the Zodiac, constellations, and stars are steeped in traditions that aided in the transmission of legends and mythology. Even today, horoscope astrology has a quasi-religious nature in that it superficially claims to predict the future. Sure

enough, back then the stars formed a method of augury that helped shape the fates of kingdoms and empires.

Thirdly, aside from religious portents, I will investigate the practical uses of astrology to organize life and calendar systems. The rising of certain stars will inform a society when to plant and when to sow. Thus, we will be able to see this ancient science as relevant to both the sacred and the mundane.

Finally, I will have to step back and look at the development diachronically from the oldest Near Eastern origins. My research will cover a multiplicity of cultures that all had interrelated and co-developing sense of astrology from the Sumerians, to the Egyptians, to the Mesopotamians, to the Persians, and finally the Hellenistic and Roman World.

Thus, I believe I can justify my research because it explore a facet of history, religion, and anthropology not regularly explored at Moravian College. I feel that while the college has a strong theological tradition and reputable history department, there is less study on the ancient world from a historical and anthropological point of view than I believe the college could benefit from. I will be able to share my research not only on scholars day but with the History Club, the Religion Society Club, and potentially even at the undergraduate Philosophy Conference. My work and research will strive for professional academic style fitting with the standards of the SOAR program, establishing credibility for my project. My goal will be a thesis and substantial written paper that will encompass my four areas of focus. With all of this, I believe I will be able to better myself first of all by having accomplish such a great goal, but I will also support Moravian College's virtue of interdisciplinary learning.