



Rain Stars Set, Lunar Stations Rise

Multivalent Textures of Pre-Islamic Arabian Astronomy
and the Hegemonic Discourse of Order

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Doctoral Dissertation Defense

Before the days of Islam, the celestial geography of Arabian astronomy was heavily textured and characterized by a rich multivalency of meaning derived from visual observation at various times of night and seasons of the year. Stars and star groupings were cultural texts that could be read by anyone in the community who knew their meanings, which were transmitted through poetry and rhymed prose outside of direction observation in the night sky. This is a characteristic of the celestial chronotope, a concept that describes the transmissible cultural meanings attached to the appearance of stars as they moved through time and space.

Many stars were connected to each other as parts of overlapping associations of stars. Arabian folkloric celestial complexes depicted scenes in the sky, with individual stars often representing animals or people, but sometimes drawing single figures together like the constellations of Greek astronomy. Arabian calendrical celestial complexes included setting rain stars (*al-anwāʿ*) and also rising stars that forecast seasonal changes. The rain stars that set just before dawn were especially laden with meaning and were commonly ascribed agency for bringing seasonal rains, a situation that was immediately at odds with the monotheistic tenets of formative Islam. Over time, Arabian celestial complexes were fragmented and incorporated within the framework of foreign astronomical systems, including the lunar stations (*manāzil al-qamar*), an impossible calendar that claimed a uniform separation in time and space between each star grouping.

These changes effectively flattened the multivalent textures of Arabian astronomy, reducing its observed celestial complexes and agency-laden celestial chronotopes to hegemonic discourses that imposed regularity within a clockwork universe. As a speech act itself, this dissertation reanimates the Arabian celestial chronotopes and celestial complexes by stripping away the hegemonic discourses that imposed order upon them and effaced their multivalency.

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May 9, 2018 - 1:00 pm
Flandrau Planetarium