



Honors 1036, Spring 2016

Mon/Wed/Fri 9:30-10:20 in Room 262 Nicholson

ANCIENT ASTRONOMY

Prof. Brad Schaefer (schaefer@lsu.edu)

The sky is part of our environment. This course will investigate the many ways at which ordinary people as well as famous characters interact with the sky, from ancient times, and even a little into the future. This is not your usual history-of-science class giving the linear development to modern knowledge, but rather covering astro-history at all levels from all around the world, telling many evocative stories. Themes of this class will be learning to apply the scientific method when you cannot do controlled experiments, how to evaluate claims made in the press (with these often being wrong), how the knowledge and usage of the skies has changed from pre-historic to modern times, and how the sky is affecting your lives today and into your future.

Course units are on (1) Archaeoastronomy, (2) How the sky affects people and history, (3) The sky as part of Earth's environment, (4) World views and the cosmos, and (5) Utilitarian and scientific applications of ancient astronomy. A selection of topics to be covered includes Stonehenge, the Star of Bethlehem, the Great Pyramid, the lost Greenland colony, Caesar's Comet, the Black Stone of the Kaaba, Columbus' trick, origin of the Zodiac, Genghis Khan's conjunction, Tunguska, Tutankahmen's meteorite knife, and the Antikythera mechanism.