

The Marginalization of Astrology in Seventeenth-century Scotland

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Astrology was taught in Scotland's universities until at least the late 1670s, as part of the instruction in natural philosophy given in the final or magistrand year of the four-year Arts degree. Lists of acquisitions and purchases in academic libraries document a steady intake of astrology books with a peak at Edinburgh University in the 1670s. Just two decades later, however, by 1700, astrology's place in academia had been irrevocably lost.

This paper will examine some of the reasons for that loss, using evidence from magistrand notebooks, library lists and allied sources. Until the early eighteenth century, lectures were read in Latin at dictation speed, to be transcribed verbatim by students. Extant notebooks, typically containing material taught over the course of one academic year, provide a day by day and often an hour by hour account of what was being taught. Magistrand notebooks, and the writings of university graduates, point to a number of factors that led to the major intellectual shift in the academic syllabus.

These include the gradual adoption of Cartesianism with its questioning of scholastic texts, the changing nature of natural philosophy through, *inter alia*, the introduction of the experimental method, and distaste for the religious and political factionalism that had been fanned by the use of astrology as propaganda during the Civil Wars. The changing identity of astrological practitioners and the influence of the Scottish virtuosi, especially the key generation born between ca.1630 and 1660, also played a major role, as did the personal animosity of influential individuals like the Newtonian promoter David Gregory, who taught at the University of Edinburgh and later became Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford University.