

# Editorial

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We are delighted to welcome you to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Skyscape Archaeology (JSA)*, a publication concerned with the role and importance of the sky in the interpretation of the material record. Currently, elements of this study can be found separately in the disciplines of archaeoastronomy, archaeology, cultural astronomy, anthropology and history, but there is no journal that specifically caters for this interdisciplinary field. *JSA* brings these elements together in order to promote cross-fertilization towards an understanding of the cosmologies of the societies who constructed and used the rich archaeological heritage we study today. Consequently, it will encourage articles that consider the relationship between material culture, the sky and society, from a wide range of disciplines.

The relationship between the sky and past and present societies is highlighted by the work of historians and anthropologists, who have explored the subject under the banner of “cultural astronomy”. The textual and ethnographic records that form the primary sources of these disciplines are testament to the role and importance of the sky in culture. American archaeology has also embraced archaeoastronomy as a means of understanding and exploring how a society’s worldview, which invariably includes the sky, is encoded in its material culture. In this it differs from British and European studies, which have been hampered by a historical divide between archaeoastronomy and archaeology. Archaeoastronomy today is an academic discipline deeply rooted in fieldwork and statistical tests for validity but, in the process of redefining itself to withstand scientific scrutiny, it failed to forge links with the wider archaeological and anthropological communities. The reasons for this are now historical but the consequences are clear: different approaches are not being integrated into holistic interpretations of the archaeological record. Traditionally, the focus of archaeologists has been on the ground, whereas archaeoastronomers have looked up to the sky. This separation is detrimental to both archaeology and archaeoastronomy, which have much to gain by working together towards a more comprehensive understanding of past and contemporary cultures. Furthermore, archaeoastronomical works have been confined to obscure and irregularly published journals or overpriced conference proceedings which are often delayed by several years. Because of this, those involved in archaeoastronomical research have difficulty finding a proper venue for

the publication of their papers. Additionally, the lack of an academic “home” for such research prevents those from other relevant disciplines from learning of developments which could inform their own findings, and *vice versa*. *JSA* will fill this gap by providing a venue that can publish this type of quality research regularly and without the constraints of conference proceedings.

More recently, with the rise of post-processual, or interpretative, archaeologies, cosmology and ideology have taken a central role in the interpretation of the archaeological record. Landscape archaeology, for example, is concerned with exploring the relationships between sites and the landscapes in which they are situated. Archaeoastronomers are also starting to move away from simple alignment identification towards interpretations that take the landscape and the wider archaeological context into account. The time is right to bridge the gap between the two fields and produce interpretations which are more far-reaching. It is *JSA*'s aim to create a space for this multidisciplinary theme by persuading archaeologists to expand their horizons and take the sky into account as another “-scape”, as well as to encourage archaeoastronomers to ground their interpretations on the material record. This unique venue is different in scope from single-discipline journals in its aims to foster multidisciplinary collaborations, further research and debate, and encourage methodological innovation.

*Skyscape archaeology* is the name we have chosen for this new interdiscipline to differentiate it from its past names and connotations. Archaeoastronomy on its own has struggled to find its identity and has been presented in a number of guises ever since Sir Norman Lockyer “endeavoured to show that a knowledge of even elementary astronomy may be of very great assistance to students of archaeology” (Lockyer 1906, 3–4). Despite Alexander Thom’s massive contribution to what he termed “megalithic astronomy” and its uptake by notable archaeologists like R. J. C. Atkinson (1975), Euan MacKie (1977) and Aubrey Burl – the last of whom provided the archaeological details for Thom’s *Megalithic Rings* (Thom and Thom 1980) – these ideas were not accepted by the archaeological mainstream. Indeed, despite the best attempts of its practitioners, the discipline acquired a New Age following and in 1976 a new name: “astro-archaeology” (Lancaster Brown 1976). The New Age writer John Michell published *A Little History of Astro-Archaeology* the following year (Michell 1977). In the New World, however, the subject was better regarded, and in October 1973 Elizabeth Baity had published “Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy So Far” in *Current Archaeology* (Baity *et al.* 1973). This seminal work introduced “archaeoastronomy” as an alternative name for the discipline, and was an important development because it added anthropology into the mix of archaeology and astronomy. Nevertheless, it has remained on the sidelines of academia even after Clive Ruggles and Nicholas Saunders recognised the sky as a cultural resource and redefined the discipline as “cultural astronomy” (Ruggles and Saunders 1993).

So why have we chosen to use the term *skyscape archaeology*? In December 2012 Fabio Silva and Nicholas Campion organised a session for the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) annual conference in Liverpool, entitled “The Role and Importance of the Sky in Archaeology”, to discuss the significance of the “skyscape” to past societies and to the understanding and interpretation of their material remains. This well-attended

session received multidisciplinary support and has resulted in the recently published book *Skyscapes: The Role and Importance of the Sky in Archaeology* (Silva and Campion 2015). The following year, at TAG in Bournemouth, Silva organised another session, entitled “Land, Sea and Sky: a ‘3-scape’ Approach to Archaeology”. Conferences are fertile breeding grounds for new ideas and it was there that we brainstormed our ideas for a new journal. Unhappy with the lack of venues for our own work, and keen to progress a methodological approach to archaeoastronomy which thoroughly incorporates archaeology, we felt the time was ripe for a new academic journal – and what better way to describe this new approach than the term *skyscape archaeology*?

This term firmly places the study of the skyscape within archaeology: it is, after all, concerned with, much like archaeology as a whole, the study of “past societies primarily through their material remains” (Renfrew and Bahn 2008, 12). It is more appropriate because it links the skyscape to the archaeological sites, their landscape and their material culture in a holistic manner, similar to the approach of landscape archaeology, which relates sites to the immediate environment. Thus, skyscape archaeology sits comfortably in the hybrid chair of archaeology, halfway between the sciences (of which archaeology already involves many) and the humanities (which traditionally is the domain of archaeology). It also demands a more thorough understanding of the archaeological process and a wider attention to the material record and cultural contextualization for the interpretation of celestial alignments and symbolism. Importantly, it retains all the valuable data as well as surveying and analytical methodologies deployed by archaeoastronomers, while also allowing for the integration of other methodologies well-established in the archaeological and anthropological worlds, such as phenomenology. We believe that this approach is the way forward, and while *JSA* was still in the planning stage we introduced the term *skyscape archaeology* in our own papers in archaeology journals (Henty 2014a; 2014b; Silva 2014).

Having approached the prestigious authorities who have inspired our work we were delighted by their encouraging response and willingness to lend their support by accepting our invitations to the Editorial Board. We would like to thank them, as without their backing the journal would not have materialized. The Board, which is as multidisciplinary as the subject-matter of *JSA*, is composed of scholars whose contributions have progressed their disciplines and enriched the multidisciplinary space where *skyscape archaeology* lies.

Issues of the *Journal of Skyscape Archaeology* will feature four types of article. *Research Articles* will be case-study or research-question driven and have a strong emphasis on empirical data. They can stem from a variety of approaches – archaeological, historical, anthropological or archaeoastronomical – as long as they relate the sky to the material culture of different societies, both past and present. Reflexivity – the self-awareness of the scholar in relation to his or her personal, social and cultural context, and how that conditions his/her responses to scholarship (Etherington 2005, 19) – is a cornerstone of any mature discipline. This often translates into fresh critical takes on theoretical and methodological issues that can propel the discipline forward into new and unsuspecting territories. *Theory & Method Articles* will focus on such issues, whether they relate to

fieldwork, data analysis, interpretation or contextualization. Due to the historical gap between the disciplines, and the obscure nature of some publications (whether they be out-of-print conference proceedings or long-gone journals), some high-quality pieces might be lost to future scholarship. To prevent this, *JSA* will feature *Reprints* of key papers in the subject-matter's history, with updates from the authors and/or commentaries from modern authorities, making them of value to both new readers and to those already familiar with the original publication. Finally, *JSA* will also include a *Forum* section consisting of an originating piece for discussion, followed by a series of short replies by different scholars and a concluding response by the original author. The topics for discussion will focus on theoretical and methodological aspects, although they may, from time to time, address particular interpretations. Although *Reprints* and *Forum* topics will be commissioned by the editors, we are, however, open to suggestions by readers.

Whereas we hope that the first two article types will appear in every single issue of *JSA*, the latter two will be less frequent. As such, this issue includes a *Reprint*, whereas the second issue (to come out in the autumn) will feature a *Forum* discussion on the topic of the minor lunar standstill.

In the interest of interdisciplinarity, and to promote the mutual engagement of archaeology, anthropology, history and archaeoastronomy/cultural astronomy, *JSA* consciously ensures that submitted papers are reviewed by more than one side of the disciplinary chasm. This means that, as editors, we will ensure that archaeoastronomy-focused papers will also be reviewed by archaeologists familiar with the sites or structures discussed, whereas papers by archaeologists engaging with the skyscape will also be reviewed by archaeoastronomers who are familiar with the nature of such data. Anthropological and historical submissions will be treated in a comparable way.

For this inaugural issue we have invited members of the editorial board to contribute key papers. **Juan A. Belmonte and A. César González-García**, in their "The Pillars of the Earth and the Sky: Capital Cities, Astronomy and Landscape", discuss the well-known fact that some cities "were built with the idea of establishing cosmic order". Focusing on four capital cities from antiquity – Thebes (Egyptian), Hattusha (Hittite), Cathago Nova (Carthaginian) and Petra (Nabatean) – they review prior archaeoastronomical surveys and how solar aspects of the religion of their builders were materialized in the orientation and location of some of the most important structures of the cities.

In "Chimney Rock and the Ontology of Skyscapes: How Astronomy, Trade, and Pilgrimage Transformed Chimney Rock", **J. McKim Malville** takes us to Chaco Canyon in southwestern Colorado, and in particular to the Great House of Chimney Rock, one of the outliers of the Chaco Regional system. Through the perspective of animism and alternative ontologies, he explores the possibility that its purpose was religious, rather than being a calendrical station as was once thought. The dramatic landscape, with the skyscape revealing solar and lunar theophanies as a backdrop, would have made it a place of pilgrimage for the local inhabitants.

**Frank Prendergast** looks at an Irish embanked stone circle and asks a simple question with a complex answer. In "The Great Stone Circle (B) at Grange, Co. Limerick – a Ceremonial Space for all Seasons?", the author takes a balanced approach to the problem

raised in the title and concludes that, contrary to popular belief, there is little evidence to support a significant celestial alignment embedded in the architecture of this unique monument. However, this is not to say that the people who built and used the stone circle did not find meaning or attribute a role to the sky. Before concluding with some notes on the modern concern over skyscape protection, the author considers the character of the Grange (B) stone circle in light of its morphology, landscape setting, ritual function and the broader role of the sky in the past.

A key misconception of non-astronomers is that reconstructing what the sky looked like for past cultures is a convoluted process requiring high-level maths and hardcore computational skills. However true this might have been in Gerald Hawkins' time, who for *Stonehenge Decoded* (1966) used a computer to find alignments at Stonehenge, technology has evolved at an incredible pace and most westerners today carry in their pockets what yesterday was a supercomputer. Present-day archaeoastronomers freely use planetarium software that allows them to reconstruct the sky from any location at any time, to a good level of accuracy, with only a modicum of astronomical knowledge required. In his methodological paper "Exploring Skyscapes in Stellarium", **Daniel Brown** explores the pros and cons of using the free and open-source software package Stellarium to explore skyscapes. He elaborates on how to create photorealistic virtual landscapes based on panoramic photography of a particular archaeological site, and assesses the limits of the software's accuracy. We hope that methodological papers such as these will help dispel the misconceptions about archaeoastronomy.

To introduce the *JSA's Reprints* section we have selected **Stephen Hugh-Jones'** seminal ethnographic piece "The Pleiades and Scorpius in Barasana Cosmology", originally published in 1982. The paper details ethnographic work carried out by the author amongst the Barasana of Colombia, and describes not only their cosmo-vision but also the role and importance of particular asterisms and constellations in their ritual and social lives. This work, along with the companion books by Stephen and his wife Christine that preceded it (C. Hugh-Jones 1979; S. Hugh-Jones 1979), were but the first in a series of studies on indigenous cosmology that moved the field forward. The modern postscript, written by the author, includes an updated bibliography which will be of interest to those wishing to further research Amazonian ethnoastronomy.

Conferences, colloquia and other meetings are important aspects of the lives of academics in every field. They are not only venues to present work to one's peers but also provide a forum to discuss current and future topics. Unfortunately, most conferences tend to be on specialized topics, failing to engage a multidisciplinary audience. Therefore, *JSA* will feature as many relevant conference reviews as possible, as an attempt to raise awareness of the different venues where *skyscape archaeology* is presented and debated, in the hope of increasing their multi-vocality in the future.

In this first issue we cover the presence of *skyscape archaeology* at three important meetings which took place in 2014: one international meeting entirely devoted to the subject of cultural astronomy and two British meetings on sister disciplines (astronomy and archaeology) that featured parallel sessions on the topics of archaeoastronomy and cosmology. The conference season started off in June with the National Astronomy

Meeting, the UK's largest conference for astronomers and astrophysicists. Daniel Brown, a member of *JSA's* editorial board, put together a day-long session on "Modern Archaeo-Astronomy: From Material Culture to Cosmology", the first of its kind in this venue, which is here reviewed by **Pamela Armstrong**. Malta was the home of 2014's meeting of the European Society for Astronomy in Culture (SEAC), an annual well-attended international event. **Barbara Rappenglück** reviews this five-day meeting on the topic of "The Materiality of the Sky". To close the year, as usual, the UK's Theoretical Archaeology Group holds its three-day meetings in December. For the third consecutive year Fabio organized a session to bridge the gap between archaeologists and archaeoastronomers. "Cosmologies in Transition: Continuity and Transformation in the Material Record" was a day-long session ending in a lively debate, both of which are here reviewed by **David Connolly**. The "Oxford" International Symposia on Archaeoastronomy, set up by the International Society for Archaeoastronomy and Astronomy in Culture (ISAAC), have been a staple of the field since their inception in 1981. Their tenth conference, entitled "Astronomy, Indigenous Knowledge and Interpretation", took place in Cape Town (South Africa) in July 2014, and we hope to bring you a review in our next issue.

Book reviews are wonderful ways to learn about new publications from fields not directly one's own but that can crossover or overlap in subject-matter, and we hope to bring our selection to a wider audience. For this issue we have highlighted two volumes. Jan Harding's *Cult, Religion and Pilgrimage* was chosen particularly by the review author (**Liz Henty**) because of his ground-breaking work on skylines stemming from an archaeology background (Harding *et al.* 2006). The second chosen volume, Tore Lomsdalen's *Sky and Purpose in Prehistoric Malta*, reviewed by an archaeologist, **David Barrowclough**, shows not only the value of learning archaeoastronomy (the book is an expanded version of his MA dissertation) but also how such an approach can complement archaeological data.

Finally, we would like to thank Equinox for giving us this opportunity, Nicholas Champion for his never-ending support, encouragement and generous grant, the Editorial Board for their vote of confidence, the contributors to this inaugural issue for sticking to the rigorous deadlines required to get this out at the appointed time, and those readers and institutions who have subscribed to the journal.

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