Editorial

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In the very first issue of *Antiquity*, founding editor O. G. S. Crawford (1927, 2) denounced as “mare’s nests” those “so called discoveries” that were nothing but newspaper “stunts”. He noted the popular demand for such material though “every page may contain gross errors and wild guesses which pass unchallenged” (Crawford 1927, 2). *Antiquity*’s current editor, Robert Witcher (2018, 3), has recently renewed the challenge to dismiss the “downright incorrect fare” found in the media today. At the heart of this incorrect fare is what Alfredo González-Ruibal *et al.* (2018, 527) has described as the inconsistency of the popular form, where we may not know whether stories come from specialists or amateurs. Certainly, at *Internet Archaeology*, Lorna Richardson (2014) has pointed out that the distinction between archaeologist and non-archaeologist can be fluid online. At *JSA* we are just as concerned with erroneous stories and their pervasive influence, because it is not just archaeology generally that is still prey to the sensationalism which prompted Crawford’s outburst some 90 years ago, but also archaeoastronomy and skyscape archaeology. When we were planning this editorial we were completely unaware that Witcher was going to bring this problem to his readers, but we regard this not so much as synchronicity as a growing concern with “fake news” generally and the power the media has to influence opinions on virtually every subject. At *JSA* we do receive submissions which can be both unscientific and sensationalist, which is why we want to bring this problem with the media to your attention.

This is of course not new and, for archaeoastronomy, probably began back in the 1960s when publishers realised the potential of the growing market for cheap paperbacks with sensationalist titles such as Gerald Hawkins’ *Stonehenge Decoded* in 1965. This popular book was marketed with the by-line “An astronomer examines one of the great puzzles of the ancient world”, and later editions featured the words “A remarkable book of historical detection” on the cover (see for example Hawkins 1974). However, that might be regarded as a small transgression when compared to the plethora of newspaper online articles, usually unauthored, that we have been subjected to over recent years. A selection of these includes titles, such as “Archaeologists May have Found Architects’ Camp for Stonehenge” (*Guardian* 2018); “From the Pyramids to Stonehenge – Were Prehistoric People Astronomers?” (*The Conversation* 2018) or “Neolithic Tombs were

Telescopes to View the Stars" (*Telegraph*, 2016). The title from the *Observer* in 2012, "How Stone Age Man Invented the Art of Raving", simply defies words.

The pity is that often this output, which is not only sensational but anachronistic, is based on excellent research projects from the field. Scholars may themselves be partly responsible for this populist slant. As Zimmerman (2018, 524) has pointed out, "archaeological discovery thrills the public" and when discussing the oldest or earliest "we" use terms such as "mysterious" and "vanished", which often trivialises the research. González-Ruibal *et al.* (2018, 526) agreed that archaeology has to be socially relevant, but they asked how it is possible to promote its public appeal without trivialising it. This is certainly a long-standing question, although it was answered as long ago as 1927 when Crawford advised, "The antidote is to create a sound and informed body of opinion, and to make it articulate" (Crawford, 1927, 2). This is the very purpose of peer-reviewing and responsible publishing. Unfortunately, there are no such checks on stories that appear online: most are unauthored, so we can't castigate individuals, but what we can try to do is establish a more bipartisan dialogue with the media, rather than wait for them to distort our findings. Newspaper editors should perhaps take their lead from examples of more serious reporting such as the article entitled "Megalithic Passage Tomb Discovered in Co Meath", published by Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ 2018). As Ireland's national public-service media organisation RTÉ is on a par with the BBC in respect to disseminating unbiased information. The report "Further Evidence of Bronze Age Cemetery at Drumnadrochit", published by the BBC News (2018), is similarly under-sensationalised.

At *JSA* we do not court publicity by publishing papers that have mysteries or puzzles for bylines; neither do we attempt to decode anything. The research articles we publish follow strict scholarly guidelines, present evidence and suggest interpretations for their findings. Unfounded speculation is carefully edited out and we are proud to have a policy of rigorous multidisciplinary peer-review that ensures that the research we publish passes the most serious scrutiny of any academic field.

In this issue we have four research papers that engage with skyscape archaeology but from different perspectives. Firstly, **Renzo Duin** takes our readers to Cochasquí in Ecuador to explore the origin and the historical sequencing of the ramped platform pyramids found there, in his research paper "Cochasquí (Ecuador): An Andean Agricultural Calendrical Centre Oriented Towards the Heliacal Setting of the Southern Cross". These pyramids have not been excavated for 50 years, but the platforms on the ramps were supposed to have been for ceremonial purposes. Drawing on his own experience in similar locations and putting it into context through in-depth ethnohistorical and ethnoastronomical studies from the Andean region, Duin attempts to find a hypothesis which is more nuanced than any that can be drawn from the archaeology. From finding that the bearing of the ramps of the platform pyramids was towards the azimuth of the heliacal setting of the Southern Cross in August, he develops the argument that this was intentional because August is an important agricultural month for the tilling of the soil in preparation for sowing maize, which is the main ingredient of the local beer. From platform pyramids we take a journey to the temples in the Angkor Wat region in

Cambodia. Here **William Romain** in his research paper “Solstice Alignments at Angkor Wat and Nearby Temples: Connecting to the Cycles of Time” looks for evidence of alignments at Angkor Wat, the most famous Khmer temple, alongside four additional sites. After a historical overview which relates Khmer cosmology to the temples’ square or rectangular ground plans he looks for alignments by superimposing measurements on Google Earth Pro imagery. Although the designs of the temples were unique to each site, he finds that solstice alignments were built into them all. His online Supplementary Material contains further details of his methodology and provides detailed assessments for ten additional Angkor temples and a more distant site known as Preah Khan of Kompong Svay.

Martha Noyes looks at the under-researched pre-contact Hawaiian cultural astronomy in her research paper “Solar Nadirs in Pre-Contact Hawaiian Cultural Astronomy”. She focuses on Kūkaniloko, which is the navel and centre of the island of O’ahu. The site was constructed as a temple for one of the four Hawaiian deities, Kāne, who was the god of sunlight and water, with one of his celestial representative symbols being the Sun. From a physical survey she found an alignment to the June solstice sunset and the December solstice sunrise – a finding which was also evidenced through reading accounts of Hawaiian mythology and an examination of a lexicon of associated Hawaiian words. Importantly the solar nadir also was marked, though knowledge of this was restricted, and Noyes has found evidence that there was awareness that certain stars heralded the nadir, leading her to the conclusion that the Hawaiian system was holistic, interrelated and cosmological. Stars too are a feature of **Claude Maumené’s** paper, “The Monumental Basin of Mont Beuvray and its Possible Orientation towards the Constellation of Gemini”. The Bibracte Basin in the centre of the Gallic city of Aedui has long been regarded as a solar site, but this research looks at the transverse axis of the basin for a stellar explanation. Here it seems that the rising and setting positions of the bright stars Castor in the constellation of Gemini and Diphda in the constellation of Cetus, the sea monster, may provide an answer. Further evidence of this is presented from an epigraphic analysis of the meanings captured in the Celtic names of the site, particularly the connection of the site name Bibracte (beaver) to Celtic mythology relating to beaver monsters.

This issue had gone to press before the Pathways to the Cosmos conference was held in Dublin on 15th September. However, because of its groundbreaking influence for our field we have managed to squeeze in a conference review by **Liz Henty**. We also feature three book reviews, the first of which is **Andrew Munro’s** review of Timothy Pauketat’s *An Archaeology of the Cosmos: Rethinking Agency and Religion in Ancient America*. This is followed by a review of the second edition of Brian E. Penprase’s *The Power of the Stars*, by **Liz Henty**. We bring this section to an end with **Tore Lomsdalen’s** review of *Decoding Neolithic Atlantic & Mediterranean Island Ritual*, edited by George Nash and Andrew Townsend. Our notices bring you details of the latest books and conferences together with an important software update from **Andrew Smith**.

Finally, as ever we would like to thank our contributors and everyone at Equinox involved in the publication of our journal as well as wishing you a happy festive season and best wishes for 2019.

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