Editorial

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With this issue the *Journal of Skyscape Archaeology* is celebrating its third anniversary. It was back in the summer of 2015 that the very first issue was released, after almost a year in the making. With three years elapsed we thought it appropriate to review the impact in the wider academy of not only the journal itself, but of the introduction of the terms “skyscape” and “skyscape archaeology”, galvanised by this very journal. These terms have slowly but steadily started to percolate, not only through archaeoastronomy and cultural astronomy, but more widely. The term skyscape has featured in print on a number of academic journals, such as *Culture & Cosmos*, *Mediterranean Archaeology & Archaeometry*, *Time & Mind*, *Journal of Physics* and *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, as well as in various abstracts elsewhere, in a number of edited volumes (e.g. Kristiansen *et al.* 2015; Ruggles 2015; Silva and Campion 2015; Rajala and Mills 2017) and in conference presentations.

However, when browsing through these items, we have found considerable variability in how scholars use the terms skyscape and skyscape archaeology. Indeed, the recent use of skyscape in the above literature is more indicative of a changing fashion than representative of what we originally envisaged for skyscape archaeology. Generally we have seen skyscape in print used: (a) to refer to the union of sky and land – a sort of expansion of the term “landscape” to also include the sky within it; (b) to designate the intersection of sky and landscape – which is to say to refer to what is often informally known as “horizon astronomy”; (c) to merely highlight the plurality of ways different societies perceive the sky and celestial objects; and (d) simply as a new label that replaces “astronomy” without adding anything to it.

In the words of Bruno Latour, there is “no good word anyway, only sensible usage” (Latour 2005, 132). With that in mind, and despite the term’s origin in the art world and its pioneering use by Harding and colleagues (2006), a new concept of skyscape was introduced at the TAG conference in 2012 with very clear goals in mind (Silva and Campion 2015). The first was to provide a clean cut with the anachronistic usage of the word “astronomy” to describe non-modern forms of engagement with the skies – something that has been widespread in the fields of cultural astronomy and archaeoastronomy, as their names demonstrate. We felt that this was an important step forward because it is

precisely the baggage that the term astronomy carries – namely its positivist, scientific, functional and mathematical roots – which we often see anachronistically and ethnocentrically projected onto other societies, consciously or not, by the theories, methods and interpretations of archaeoastronomers (see Silva 2017 for a more in-depth discussion). Fortunately, in the last 30 or so years, archaeoastronomy has moved away from narratives that include “prehistoric observatories”, “astronomer-priests” or the populist “ancient aliens”. However, there is still work to be done and only by using a higher and more refined degree of reflexivity can we acknowledge and identify the biases and assumptions that still survive in the theories, methods and interpretations of archaeoastronomy.

In parallel to this desire, the relabelling was intended to form new relationships in the scholar’s mind by the term’s metaphorical similarity with other scapes that had already become common parlance in archaeology and anthropology, such as “landscape”, “taskscape” and “seascape”. Thus, our second goal was to push the field into the realms of “thick description” (Geertz 1973); of proper socio-cultural contextualisation; of that interpretative archaeoastronomy that Ruggles (2011) advocated. Through this immersion in the socio-cultural context, the field of skyscape archaeology opens itself up to answering questions of wider relevance – questions which are of much more interest to archaeologists, anthropologists and historians – such as those relating to religion, belief, ritual, theology, ecology, social memory, cosmology and ontology. The skyscape of a given society cross-cuts and intersects with many of these other elements of its world(s) and it is precisely in this cross-cutting that the true potential of skyscape archaeology lies: it provides new arenas, rarely considered in archaeology, that complement already-existing ones and that may unlock some long-unanswered questions or provide new views on old issues. It was in this sense that Harding’s team (Harding *et al.* 2006) originally used the term. As such, the introduction of the skyscape was meant to push the field beyond the techno-functional interpretations of “ancient astronomies” and into a more multi-vocal interpretive spectrum. “Skyscape” in this sense is not the one-dimensional image found in paintings but has the depth and agency which so far had only been found in those other scapes.

By achieving this, we also reasoned that it would open up the field to archaeologists who, historically, have shied away from archaeoastronomical expositions and claims, but who nevertheless have been engaging with land, task and seascapes and the role they play in the cosmologies and ontologies of the societies they study. We posited, based on our experiences within archaeological departments and conferences, that one of the reasons this happened was not so much a perceived lack of rigour in archaeoastronomy, but its overreliance on excessively technical expositions and over-precise claims, as well as its lack of engagement with the totality of the archaeological record, the other mentioned scapes and wider social questions. In this aspect, at least, it was archaeoastronomy that needed to play catch-up to archaeology and the wider humanities, and this was, and still is, our aim for skyscape archaeology. Only by bridging this gap can we envisage a future where archaeoastronomers, or rather skyscape archaeologists, will be called upon to fully engage and collaborate with archaeologists on common research questions and projects.

It is this deep sense of theoretical and methodological reflexivity, as well as the emphasis on the socio-cultural contexts that we want to promote with the term “skyscape” and which, by extension, form the foundations of skyscape archaeology. To us, sensible usage of both terms involves first and foremost a degree of reflexivity well above the norm of archaeoastronomy in the past. It demands that we recognise and actively avoid the pitfalls caused by the biases we bring to our research. When taken to its maximum degree, reflexivity demands total immersion in the society we are studying: without this any interpretation will reflect more our own Western assumptions than the people we study, past or present. On the other hand, when we fully immerse ourselves into the society we are studying we cannot but have to come to terms with that alterity, that otherness, that separates *us* from *them* – otherwise we will continue to see them “as strange as Moroccans”, to use Geertz’s (1976, 5) phrase. Hence, thick description and reflexivity must necessarily come hand in hand.

Ultimately, this is not so much a radical reorientation of the field, but an opening up of archaeoastronomy to the humanities: opening it up to the ideas, theories and methods of modern anthropology and archaeology. This, of course, cannot be achieved overnight, but only as a slow, steady relearning process. This journal is part of that process of change and this issue, once again, sits comfortably within that tipping point.

The issue opens with a Research Article on “Urban Planning in the First Unfortified Spanish Colonial Town: The Orientation of the Historic Churches of San Cristóbal de La Laguna” by **Alejandro Gangui and Juan Antonio Belmonte**. This city of Tenerife (Spain) features a regular grid-like street system which is thought to have provided the model for many colonial towns in the Americas. A number of hypotheses have been put forward regarding the intentionality behind the city’s unique layout and orientation. The authors explore them using the tools of archaeoastronomy: by examining the orientation of 21 historical churches in the city, they find a pattern that suggests an association with sunrise close to the feast-day of San Cristóbal de Licia, the saint to whom the city was dedicated. As they put it, their “findings, at least, momentarily put aside the need for additional hard-to-verify philosophical hypotheses” regarding the layout of the colonial city.

Keeping to Spanish territory, **José María Abril Hernández and José Antonio Morena-López** look at a first-century AD temple within the Ibero-Roman sanctuary complex of Torreparedones (Baena, Spain). The temple features a partially buried *cella* featuring a skylight that allowed sunlight to penetrate its dark depths and hit a column-shaped *baetylus*. Using an experimental approach, the authors reconstructed these architectonic features and suggest that, at noon, a beam of light would move from the top to the bottom of the *baetylus* throughout the year, illuminating certain ornamental cordons at relevant dates and therefore working as a solar calendar.

Also looking at religious structures in Roman colonies, **Melanie Sticker-Jantschke** takes “A New Look at Old Temples: Augusta Raurica and its Skyscape in the First and Second Centuries AD”. This veteran colony in Switzerland was home to a number of sanctuaries whose location and orientation reveal how the Gallo-Roman elite reconciled local beliefs associated with seasonal activities and festivities with the new socio-political

and religious requirements – therefore revealing a very clear cosmological element to ongoing debates about the degree, and scope, of Romanisation in Gaulish lands. This Research Article also touches on the fact that toponyms, such as the Planche des Belles Filles mountain and associated folklore, can not only preserve celestial tales but also explicit spatial links between the skyscape, the landscape and the built environment.

A similar connection between skyscape and landscape is seen in the French West Indies island of Guadeloupe. In “The Wrath of Zemi: Arawak Hurricane Prediction in the Caribbean” **Renzo S. Duin** combines ethnographic and orientation studies to explore an indigenous method for predicting the arrival of hurricanes. The direction of the wind, the location of the La Désirade rocky outcrop and the movement of the rising sun along the horizon played a role in establishing long-term settlement at Anse à la Gourde. From this settlement the Sun would be seen to rise behind La Désirade at the beginning of hurricane season, and the site’s archaeology presents many features that relate to indigenous conceptualisation of these most destructive of natural forces. On average, “Guadeloupe is hit by a major hurricane every 18.13 years, which means that every generation has its own major hurricane experience as a point of reference.” Considering the amount of destruction that we saw the Category 5 hurricanes Irma and Maria wreak in the Caribbean last year, it is no wonder that some degree of hurricane prediction was not only necessary for survival but was also imbued with cosmological symbolism.

As discussed above, skylscapes are not restricted to horizon alignments to Sun and Moon but go well beyond these to encompass any and all relations between all celestial objects and all other elements of a society. In this issue’s Forum we focus on this subject and feature a number of opinion pieces focused on: zenith and nadir passages of the Sun, by **Ivan Šprajc**; hunter-gatherer star configurations, by **Brian Hayden**; social memory and skyscape narratives, by **Roslyn M. Frank**; and the place of stars in cultural astronomy, by **Bernadette Brady**. All in all, the topics covered and opinions presented are sure to fuel discussions, and drive the field forward for the foreseeable future.

Efrosyni Boutsikas reviews the joint SEAC, ISAAC and INSAP meeting “Road to the Stars” which, for an entire week last September, gathered together the leading figures of cultural astronomy in all its variants in Santiago de Compostela (Spain) for what was a truly memorable conference. We also feature three reviews of edited volumes in this issue: **Robert Hannah** reviews John M. Steele’s *The Circulation of Astronomical Knowledge in the Ancient World*, **Pamela Armstrong** takes a look at Vincent Ard and Lucille Pillot’s *Giants in the Landscape: Monumentality and Territories in the European Neolithic* and **Fiona Bowie** reviews Darrelyn Gunzburg’s *The Imagined Sky: Cultural Perspectives*.

We are sad to learn of the death of Vito Francesco Polcaro, a friend and colleague who began questioning the foundations of archaeoastronomy long before we had conceived the notion of skyscape archaeology. For him archaeoastronomy was an interdisciplinary where a working group needed to include at least one archaeologist, who could guarantee that archaeological and anthropological principles were followed (Polcaro and Polcaro 2009, 223–224). He will be greatly missed at SEAC conferences, where he was a well-respected figure, and we hope we can continue with his ideals.

Finally, we could not close this first editorial of our fourth volume, and the celebration of completing *JSA*'s third year, without thanking the members of our Editorial Board, who not only represent the change we aim to achieve, but have also been great supporters of this cause. Equally, everyone at Equinox Publishing for having believed in our vision for this journal and continuing to back it up after three long years; the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture (University of Wales Trinity Saint David), whose aid in the first two years of the journal was essential to making it a reality; the European Society for Astronomy in Culture (SEAC), for supporting the journal; all the authors who have submitted papers over the past three years and had to endure our endless emails back-and-forth; and, finally, we must thank our subscribers and readers who demonstrate there is an audience for this strand of archaeology, often forgotten elsewhere. We would also like to say thank you to Caroline Ormrod, our patient editorial assistant who we are pleased to announce has been promoted to Assistant Editor.

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