

Introduction: “A Slow Convergence”? Archaeoastronomy and Archaeology

In 1992 American archaeologist Keith Kintigh published a controversial article entitled “I Wasn’t Going to Say Anything, But Since You Asked”, in the American publication *Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy News*. In it he proposed that archaeoastronomy had had little impact on mainstream archaeology, and that archaeoastronomers felt accordingly under-appreciated. He said that the reason this was the case was because archaeologists tended to ignore archaeoastronomy because, whilst its claims might be legitimate, they did not answer the questions asked by archaeologists in their debates about theory or regional prehistory. Kintigh pointed out that this was not an innate isolationism by archaeologists, who otherwise had productive relationships with many specialist fields with which they worked together “toward *shared goals*”. By implication it was the self-containment of archaeoastronomers that precluded the same relationship between the disciplines.

He added that some archaeoastronomy was “high-tech, celestial butterfly collecting” and for it to contribute anything to social science it must also have a bearing on research issues. For example, an anthropological study of ancient cosmology may well be investigated archaeoastronomically, giving results which have cultural significance. For Kintigh, architectural alignments are, like any other material discoveries, artefacts, and for archaeologists the interest is not in the artefact *per se*, but in what it tells them about the culture to which it relates. His article ended with a challenge to archaeoastronomers to use their skills to address theoretical issues.

Archaeoastronomer Anthony Aveni promptly replied in the next issue of *A&E News* with a response entitled “Nobody Asked, But I Couldn’t Resist” (Aveni 1992). Aveni acknowledged the constructive element of Kintigh’s piece, which he felt should be read by all archaeoastronomers and students. Sixteen years later he was of the same opinion as to the importance of the original piece and the qualifications of his answering piece, and he included both articles in his edited volume *Foundations of New World Cultural Astronomy* (Aveni 2008). Aveni suggested that Kintigh’s arguments depended on which archaeology and what sort of archaeoastronomy was being dealt with. He pointed to examples and areas in the New World – Mexico, the American Southwest and Peru – where archaeoastronomers were routinely invited to take part in joint investigations. In the Old World he highlighted the collaboration of Burl and Ruggles. While Aveni agreed that the

research paradigms were indeed different he had also witnessed a “slow convergence” as a result of archaeoastronomy becoming more interdisciplinary in scope. He made a plea to the archaeoastronomers of the day to address substantive questions and improve the intellectual quality of their work, coupled with a request that archaeologists should accept archaeoastronomy’s improved validity. Revisiting the debate in 2011, Clive Ruggles said that as it was now the norm for interpretations to be rooted in the context of broader social questions, the exchange between Kintigh and Aveni ‘is rightly consigned to the past’ (Ruggles 2011, 8).

Wondering whether Ruggles’ view is representative of the relationship between the disciplines today, in 2016, 24 years on from the original publications and eight years on from their reprints, *JSA* has asked for the views of archaeoastronomers and archaeologists from both the New and the Old Worlds. We are delighted that Anthony Aveni, Timothy Pauketat, Juan Belmonte and Tim Darvill kindly agreed to give us their latest opinions on this issue, and their replies are printed below.

References

- Aveni, A F., 1992. “Nobody Asked, But I Couldn’t Resist: A Response to Keith Kintigh on Archaeoastronomy and Archaeology”. *Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy News* 6: 1, 4 [online]. Accessed October 2015. <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~tlaloc/archastro/ae6.html>
- Aveni, A. F., ed., 2008. *Foundations of New World Cultural Astronomy: A Reader with Commentary*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.
- Kintigh, K. W., 1992. “I Wasn’t Going to Say Anything, But Since You Asked”. *Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy News* 5: 1, 4 [online]. Accessed October 2015, <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~tlaloc/archastro/ae5.html>
- Ruggles, C. L. N., 2011. “Pushing Back the Frontiers or Still Running Around in the Same Circles? ‘Interpretative Archaeoastronomy’ Thirty Years On”. In “*Oxford IX*” *International Symposium on Archaeoastronomy*, edited by C. L. N. Ruggles, 1–18. Proceedings of the IAU Symposium 278. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743921311012427>