

Editorial

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Nearly seventy years ago Christopher Hawkes, one of the most prominent archaeologists of his time, decried the state of archaeological literature, which he thought was limited by its failure to systemise the subject (Hawkes 1951, 12). His claim was a preamble to expressing his belief that what archaeology needed was “a better terminology, and a better documentation” (Hawkes 1951, 15). In fact, at that time, despite archaeology being well represented by journals such as *Antiquity*, the *Archaeological Journal* and the *Proceedings* of both the Scottish and English Societies of Antiquaries, there were few books being published. In the decades that followed, processual theory books, such as Willey and Phillips’ *Method and Theory in American Archaeology* (1958) or Lewis Binford’s *New Perspectives in Archaeology* (1968) began to adorn the library shelves while at the same time space was made for what David Clarke (1973, 18) called “subtheories”: books generated by the subdisciplines that came into being because of the “alternative models” (Clarke 1973, 6) that originated as a response to the demand for a more scientific methodology. Year on year the library shelves expanded as new theories came into play, such as those presented in the works of the postprocessualists, such as Ian Hodder (1986), Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley (Shanks and Tilley 1987). Further along the shelves we find specific sections on the Neolithic, the Bronze Age and so on *ad infinitum* throughout prehistory and history, continent by continent. Silva and Campion’s *Skyscapes: The Role and Importance of the Sky in Archaeology* (2015) was added to the stacks in 2015, marking the need for a skyscape archaeology section of its own.

What is the importance of this legacy, this transmission of ideas from generation to generation? Thomas Kuhn suggested (Kuhn 1970 [1962], 11) that because any research which is based on shared paradigms is subject to that field’s rules, it generates a particular research tradition. This research tradition is fostered by each and every academic community because, as Kuhn pointed out, it allows its insiders to “feel like participants in a long-standing historical tradition” (Kuhn 1970 [1962], 138). If the findings of new research are not historically contextualised or do not build on past ideas about a particular topic, they cannot be truly meaningful in an epistemological sense – that dreaded literature review is there for a very important purpose, and avoid it at the expense of your creditability as a scholar. New theoretical perspectives come into being on the basis of previous

understandings: reflexive research, which *JSA* endorses wholeheartedly, needs to take this into account.

Accessing all the material we need poses several problems. Not only does the price of new academic books continually increase, but so too does the sheer number of volumes we may have to consider, not just specifically for a particular piece of new research, but more generally to keep up to date with current trends. A recent flyer from Oxbow Books, a renowned publisher of archaeology books, this year announced there were 3904 books in its Bargains and Special Offers catalogue (Oxbow Books 2019). This exponential growth in publications shows no sign of slowing down, which, while it is good for the field, unfortunately comes at a time when universities in Britain are struggling to find funds to buy books for their libraries. For example, a random search of university library catalogues shows that at least one university in Scotland does not hold a copy of Richard Bradley and Courtney Nimura's 2016 book on the use and reuse of stone circles (reviewed in *JSA* 3.1), and Bradley's *A Geography of Offerings: Deposits of Valuables in the Landscapes of Ancient Europe* (2016) is only available digitally. We hear from our editorial board members that this is not only a British problem but a worldwide one.

Practically speaking, there are at least three issues. Firstly, the sheer number of publications makes it difficult to pick one or two volumes out of the multitude for purchasing, and if these are not in the university library or in an academic bookshop near you, information for your choice might be limited to the enticing description on the publishers' websites or the snippets you can glean on Google Books or the "Look Inside" function provided by an online retailer. Secondly, the problem becomes greater if you rely on SCONUL, which generally does not allow access to the local university's digital content. Thirdly, student researchers disenfranchised by their universities when they finish their studies have an even more difficult path to climb.

This introduction not only leads on to the subject of book reviews but also explains why these are so important, especially if you have no access to the source itself or alternatively want to read a different take on the book than just the publisher's blurb. *JSA* is proud of its contribution in this respect, publishing several reviews in each issue. Not only do we cover all aspects of our field but our reviews are open access. In his wisdom, Hawkes concluded: "But I do not ask for *many* new books: if they were the right ones, quite a short list would do" (Hawkes 1951, 15). So, in our *Book Reviews* section we try to bring you a "short list" but a pertinent and relevant one. In this issue alone we are publishing three book reviews. Firstly, **Ingrid O'Donnell** reviews *Neolithic Britain: The Transformation of Social Worlds* by Keith Ray and Julian Thomas. This is followed by **Bernadette Brady's** opinion on Gyula Priskin, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Moon: Coffin Texts Spells 154–160* while **Martha Noyes** brings her expertise on Hawaiian astronomy (see her research in *JSA* 4.2) to her review of Patrick Vinton Kirch and Clive Ruggles, *Heiau 'Āina Lani: The Hawaiian Temple System in Ancient Kahikinui and Kaupō, Maui*. We welcome suggestions and new reviewers so please contact us if you would like to contribute a review for a future issue.

Research, however, also progresses through the medium of journal articles. In this issue we are very proud to feature a globe-trotting collection of pieces. The first *Research*

Article, by **Robert A. Benfer and Lucio Laura**, employs ethnohistorically attested Peruvian mythology to interpret architectural features and celestial alignments at the site of Buena Vista in Chillón Valley. The myth in question identifies the Fox as an observer of human activities, who reports them to the Condor, which in turn flies up to the animated mountain peaks to inform them of these activities. In “A Stone Pillar of a Condor Marked the Equinox at the Site of Buena Vista, Peru at 2200 BC”, the scholars identify a dual alignment that mirrors this myth around the March equinox date.

A similar multi-disciplinary approach is taken by **William F. Romain** in “Lunar alignments at Ur: Entanglements with the Moon God Nanna”, where he suggests that the ancient city of Ur was astronomically aligned to the Moon. Using a combination of satellite imagery, early maps and aerial photographs he explores further evidence from the mythology surrounding the Moon God Nanna to propose that the city was intentionally aligned in this way.

This issue’s first *Theory and Method* article looks at “Lunar Standstills or Lunistics, Reality or Myth?”. **A. César González-García and Juan A. Belmonte** propose a terminology to clarify this often-confusing issue (see, for instance the *Forum* discussion published in *JSA* 2.1). They then counter the claims often raised by some scholars that these most elusive of celestial phenomena were never noticed by any premodern society, by highlighting a number of archaeological sites whose statistically significant, and for some socio-historically contextualised, orientations can only be explained through an alignment to the major lunar standstill. In addition, they take a fresh look at classical sources, most notably Ptolemy, to highlight what looks like an awareness of the extreme positions of the Moon – certainly providing plenty of food for thought.

Next, **Katya Stroud** looks at how the Tarxien temples of Malta have been interpreted through time. In her article, titled “A Neolithic World View Lost in Translation: The Case of the Tarxien Temples”, she finds that archaeological interpretations have been rooted in twentieth-century religious perspectives and scholarly traditions. In opposition, she argues for a new perspective which will lead to more dynamic interpretations – an endeavour that is at the heart of skyscape archaeology.

Our *Commentary* section features an addendum to a research article by **William F. Romain**, published in *JSA* 4.2, which expands on issue of day counts and the numbers of demons and devas represented in the Khmer complex of Angkor Wat.

The annual SEAC conference is important for our field of skyscape archaeology and in September 2019 this year’s sessions took place within the annual conference of the European Association of Archaeologists at Bern. In her conference review **Emília Pásztor** highlights the issues raised.

Following our usual *Conferences and Books Notices* we bring you a *Software Notice* by **Sue Greaney** which allows access to the new skyscape app launched by English Heritage.

We wish our readers a happy festive season and look forward to bringing you more skyscape archaeology research in 2020.

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