Skyscapes in the Academy: Is There a Future? Part 2

In JSA 6.1 we published the opinions of several leading archaeoastronomers with regard to the question of if there is a future for skyscapes in the academy. To provide balance, in this issue we asked archaeologists for their point of view on the same topic, outlined in the pages that follow. For a full appreciation of the differing perspectives we recommend that both Forums are read together.

The results of a recent survey of almost 200 archaeologists showed that the vast majority agreed that archaeoastronomy is relevant to archaeology and that it has a role in the study of British prehistory (Henty 2020, 19–22). Yet only half of them thought archaeoastronomy should be part of the archaeologists’ tool-box or taught as part of an archaeology degree. Its presence in the British academy has been rare and always as an optional adjunct to something else. For example, at the University of Leicester, Clive Ruggles taught “Archaeoastronomy: theory and practice” from 1989 to 2003 as a third-year option in the BA and BSc Archaeology degrees. Similarly, Lionel Sims’ optional course at the University of East London, entitled “Decoding Stonehenge”, ran from 1993 until 2011, but for the BSc Anthropology degree programme. Currently, only the University of Wales Trinity Saint David teaches archaeoastronomy as an optional module in the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology programme. Elsewhere in the world, there is a massive open online course (MOOC) simply titled “Archaeoastronomy” created in 2016 by Giulio Magli of the Department of Mathematics at the Politecnico di Milano, two different archaeoastronomy courses as part of the “Integrative Prehistory and Archaeological Science” degree course taught by Rita Gautschy at Basel University and a recently announced Graduate Certificate in “Archaeoastronomy and Astronomy in Culture” at the University of Oklahoma, directed by Steven Gullberg of the School of Integrative and Cultural Studies. Historically, therefore, archaeoastronomy has not found a consistent place in the academy, but this is not to say that all scholars of archaeology, anthropology or history are uninterested in skyscape research.

This begs the question of where do skyscapes belong in the academy? Is it a field in its own right, worthy of its own undergraduate or postgraduate courses? Or should it rather be recognised as a sub-discipline and therefore live within more general programmes? And if the latter, what should the parent discipline be? Cultural astronomy (as at Trinity Saint David), archaeology (as at Leicester), anthropology (as at East London)
or even astronomy, architecture or mathematics (as at Milan)? Something else, or maybe a combination of the above? What about the curricula of such courses? Which topics are a must-have and which depend on the disciplinary parenthood of the course? Given that the *Journal of Skyscape Archaeology* links skyscapes with archaeology, we have asked a number of archaeologists for their views. It is our wish that the variety of voices and perspectives present in this Forum will shed light on the topic, inspire dialogue and chart a course for the new era of skyscapes in the academy.

**References**