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Notwithstanding Sir Norman Lockyer sometimes being described as the father of archaeoastronomy, most writers credit the 1963 publication in *Nature* of Gerald Hawkins’ controversial paper “Stonehenge Decoded” as being the catalyst for the modern discipline of archaeoastronomy. Behind the scenes, Alexander Thom had been quietly publishing surveys of megalithic geometry and mensuration, but his first book, *Megalithic Sites in Britain*, was not published until 1967. No-one conversant with archaeoastronomy needs to be reminded of his contribution to what was then called megalithic science. Although the subject has appeared in different guises such as megalithic science, astro-archaeology, archaeoastronomy, archaeotopography, cultural astronomy and, latterly, skyscape archaeology, this intriguing discipline is over fifty years old.

Despite the best efforts of its disciplinarians, all highly accomplished scholars in their field, the establishment of conference programmes such as SEAC (European Society of Astronomy and Culture) and the “Oxford” conferences of ISAAC (The International Society for Archaeoastronomy and Astronomy in Culture) and the publication of specialised journals such as *Archaeoastronomy: The Journal of Astronomy in Culture* and the *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, archaeoastronomy fails, in the main, to be part of mainstream academia. *The Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy*, edited by Clive L. N. Ruggles, endeavours to set the record straight. Published ten years after his edition of *Ancient Astronomy: An Encyclopedia of Cosmologies and Myth* (Ruggles 2005), this latest book is less a handbook than a celebration of the diverse study areas that archaeoastronomy and ethnoastronomy cover throughout the world.

In his preface Ruggles says that archaeoastronomy and ethnoastronomy are jointly known as “cultural astronomy” (p. v), which begs the question why this impressive collec-
tion was not simply called the Handbook of Cultural Astronomy. The eponymous disciplines, Ruggles says, are concerned with “humankind’s perceptions and understanding of astronomical phenomena, throughout human history and among all cultures” (p. v). Clearly this academic field has “significant value in informing broader cultural questions”. Ruggles claims that the three-volume handbook sets out to be a picture of the state of the discipline as well as to provide a source of reference for theory, method, interpretation and best practice (p. vi). He says its aim is to be accessible to scholars and interested parties, but unfortunately its high price, despite discounting on some popular websites, makes it out of reach to anyone other than interested institutions. Clearly it is a tour de force from a scholar who with Cooke and other fellow students first published an archaeoastronomical survey on Callenish in the JHA nearly forty years ago (Cooke et al. 1977). Additionally, the book has an impressive cast list of fellow scholars which reads like a list of who’s who in archaeoastronomy, all of whom are clearly concerned with presenting their subject matter in the best possible light. With different section editors for each of the major parts, Parts I and II variously discuss the key concepts and themes in archaeoastronomy, whereas the major content of the handbook is concerned with case studies in the widest possible sense, geographically and through times and cultures. Owing to the size of the “handbook” and its importance to the field, no brief review can do it justice, so we have decided to concentrate on the theoretical issues and methodology in the two opening parts. The review of Part I follows in this issue, with a review of Part II in the next one.

Part I is entitled “Themes and Issues” and is edited by Juan Antonio Belmonte, past SEAC president and holder of the Carlos Jaschek Award for services to archaeoastronomy (SEAC 2015). The first of two contributions by Stanislaw Iwaniszewski sets out a rationale for cultural astronomy by saying that from an anthropological point of view, concepts of time and space should be viewed as cultural products; that is, as artefacts (p. 4). In a similar way all peoples create a concept of the universe or cosmos in which they live but he warns that archaeoastronomy, based on modern concepts of the universe, has to accept that concepts of time and space are embedded in both nature and culture in order to “transcend the nature/culture dualism” (pp. 8–9). Over the years archaeoastronomy has been accused of ethnocentrism (Ruggles 2000, S67), so Iwaniszewski’s reminder of cultural relativity in terms of space, time and the cosmos are a fitting introduction to this handbook. Ruggles’ subsequent paper shows how cultural diversity has led to the creation of a range of calendars which are almost always linked to astronomical cycles. That is not to say that indigenous peoples derived their calendars exclusively from the sky, despite its obvious importance, but rather as a combination of the correlations made between events in the sky and those in the natural world such as the passing of the seasons (p. 16).

The following contributions in this first part show the complexity and range of archaeoastronomical studies. Rolf Krauss explains that astronomical chronology is the dating of historical events that are linked to astronomical observation, whereas Fernando Pimenta explores astronomy and navigation. Edwin C. Krupp, John M. Steele, Nicholas Campion, Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, Roslyn M. Frank and William Breen Murray
respectively discuss archaeoastronomy and ethnoastronomy in terms of power, politics, astrology, medicine, constellations and rock art. Stephen C. McCluskey and David A. King look at the connection between astronomy and religion, respectively in Christianity and Islam. Alejandro Martin Lopez looks at the interaction of indigenous and colonial astronomies, mainly in South America. Nestling in this selection is a thoughtful essay by Belmonte, who goes to great lengths to explain that the term “ancient observatory” is problematic, given its past in discussions of Stonehenge (pp. 136–137). He himself has used the term “observing site” and Iwaniszewski (2010) proposed the term “ancient sky-watching location” (p. 137). However, Belmonte suggests that the correct term is context dependent and although there is evidence of ancient observatories built specifically to observe celestial phenomena, they must not be confused with ritual or funereal sites even if these included astronomical alignments.

Alun Salt, in his overview of the history of archaeoastronomy, says that like many disciplines “archaeoastronomy is an ongoing conversation” (p. 213). He dares to tackle the as yet, in this volume, unvoiced divide between archaeoastronomy and archaeology by saying that there was little difference between, for example, the questions McCluskey (2005) had asked about the social construction of knowledge and those posed by post-processual archaeologists (p. 221). Referring to the 2007 paper in *Antiquity*, “The Age of Stonehenge”, by Parker Pearson and collaborators (2007), which has twenty credited authors including Ruggles, he concludes that this has come about because these post-processual archaeologists now ask different questions (p. 222). Unfortunately these interdisciplinary collaborations between archaeologists and astronomers are rare. Stephen C. McCluskey reports a survey of the highest academic level of ISAAC (p. 228). Not surprisingly astronomers make up about 36%, closely followed by anthropologists, at around 28%. Archaeologists rank equally with physicists at around 13%. Only 5% have an actual archaeoastronomy qualification, which raises pedagogical concerns for the discipline. However, a survey of 40 dissertations, where students showed departmental affiliation, resulted in over half listing archaeology. In a similar vein Victor B. Fisher researched introductory archaeology textbooks but says that though the situation is improving, archaeoastronomy coverage is very limited (p. 258).

The sidelining of archaeoastronomy in mainstream education has, however, had no effect on its popular appeal. Edwin C. Krupp explores how many sites have become “archaeoastronomical icons” and takes a voyage round the most famous popular myths and speculations, culminating with the 2012 phenomenon (p. 281). A second contribution by Iwaniszewski shows the appropriation of the stereotypical past by economic consumerism and global tourism (p. 291). Michael Cotte concludes Part I with an account of the Archaeoastronomical Heritage and the World Heritage Convention, which has resulted in the web portal of UNESCO and the IAU (2015), which gives an updated “panorama” of astronomical and archaeoastronomical heritage.

The diversity of these general themes and the extensive cross-referencing throughout the volume give the reader a taste of what to expect from the main body of research papers. If some of the words and ideas sound familiar it is because these eminent scholars have been publishing academic papers for decades and so much has already
been said about the discipline, it is difficult to give it a new slant. However, Belmonte must be congratulated for the way he has tackled this difficulty in the first part of this comprehensive overview of archaeoastronomy and ethnoastronomy today.

References


