

PREFACE

The tenth volume of *Archaeologia Baltica*, “Astronomy and cosmology in folk traditions and cultural heritage,” is dedicated to the scientific work of the interdisciplinary research fields of archaeoastronomy and ethnoastronomy that have developed in the second half of the 20th century. The publication is based on the presentations of the international SEAC 2007 and OXFORD VIII conference “Astronomy and cosmology in folk traditions and cultural heritage.” At the initiative of SEAC (La Société Européenne pour l’Astronomie dans la Culture) and ISAAC (The International Society for Archaeoastronomy and Astronomy in Culture), the conference was held on 22-31 July, 2007 and organized in Klaipėda by Klaipėda University in collaboration with the Molėtai District Museum. Forty-two of the best conference presentations were evaluated by specialists in these fields and selected according to how well they corresponded to scholarly requirements and dealt with appropriate research questions in cultural astronomy.

The object of research in cultural astronomy is not that of heavenly bodies and the universe in themselves, but rather the traditional knowledge of the celestial bodies and the universe developed by various peoples and cultures. Two research approaches are characteristic of cultural astronomy: archaeoastronomy and ethnoastronomy. Archaeoastronomy is directed toward the investigation of the astronomy of prehistoric cultures based on archaeological evidence, while ethnoastronomy also investigates present-day communities’ ethnic knowledge about heavenly bodies, using modern ethnographical and ethnological research methods. However, the field of cultural astronomy is commonly called archaeoastronomy and the scientists who engage in it – archaeoastronomers.

Researchers interested in issues regarding cultural astronomy gather at this field’s conferences every year. The international organization SEAC arranges annual

conferences that examine the most relevant problems in cultural astronomy. The founder of this organization was astrophysics Professor Carlos Jaschek (1926-1999) of Strasbourg University. He had suggested founding an organization that would take on researching European archaeoastronomical and ethnoastronomical problems during an archaeoastronomy and ethnoastronomy conference in Strasbourg in 1992. The first SEAC conference was held in 1993 in Smolyan, Bulgaria. The goal of these conferences is to unite together scientists from various countries all around the world for broad interdisciplinary discussions regarding the fields of archaeoastronomical and ethnoastronomical research, with the aim to present and discuss the newest achievements and opportunities in the investigation of knowledge regarding heavenly bodies, astronomical practice, and reflections of world conception in old and current ethnocultural traditions. Fourteen international conferences had been organized before 2007. The SEAC conference in Lithuania was the fifteenth.

In addition to the annual SEAC conferences, the Oxford conferences on archaeoastronomy are held on average every four years. These conferences acquired their name from the first conference that occurred in 1981 at Oxford University. Seven Oxford conferences had been organized before 2007. Originally an International Steering Committee organized these conferences, under the leadership of Michael Hoskin and Anthony Aveni. At Oxford 7 in 2004, the role of conference organizer was taken on by a formal international organization, ISAAC, which had been founded in 1995. In 1999 a joint conference was organized by the two international organizations, SEAC and ISAAC, in the Spanish Canary Islands. The conference in Klaipėda was the successful continuation of the collaboration that began in the Canary Islands between these two international organizations of researchers in cultural astronomy.



Conference participants.

The next, 16th SEAC conference is planned for 2009 in Alexandria, Egypt, while the 9th Oxford conference is planned for 2011 in Lima, Peru.

The first archaeoastronomy conference in Lithuania was organized in 1988 together with Latvian and Estonian scientists at the Molėtai Astronomical Observatory. It was decided to arrange such conferences annually, taking turns with hosting their locations in the three Baltic countries. The initiators of these meetings were Libertas Klimka (Lithuania), Heino Eelsalu (1930-1998) (Estonia), and Jānis Klētnieks (Latvia).



Conference moments.

Several such conferences took place during the span of 1989-1991. However, when the Baltic states regained their independence, the tradition of organizing these conferences broke off.

Lithuanian researchers' ties with the SEAC began to form in 1995 when, for the first time since the fall of the Soviet Union, J. Vaiškūnas and S. Lovčikas, representatives of the Lithuanian Ethnocosmology Center, attended the SEAC conference in Sibiu (Romania) (Rasteniene 1996) and became members of the SEAC. Since then, at least one representative from Lithuania has attended the SEAC conferences almost every year. At the general assembly of the SEAC in Gdansk in 1997, it was suggested that the 2000 SEAC conference take place in Lithuania, at the Ethnocosmology Museum. However, due to unfortunate circumstances, the conference did not take place in Lithuania, but rather was transferred to Moscow.

During the SEAC conference of 2002 in Tartu, an offer was made to Jonas Vaiškūnas to organize the 2007

SEAC conference in Lithuania. Later it was decided that this would be a joint SEAC and OXFORD conference. Organizing a conference of this scale became possible only with the agreement of Klaipėda University's Baltic Sea Region History and Archaeology Institute to collaborate in its organization, together with the Molėtai District Museum.

On 22-31 July, 2007, over the course of eight days, researchers from different countries all over the world engaged in extensive discussions of interdisciplinary scope in the new and modern auditorium and service complex of "Studlendas" at Klaipėda University. Eighty-two scholars participated in the conference and 72 of them gave presentations. The presenters represented 26 countries: those of the European Union, the United States of America, Argentina, Norway, Israel, Australia, Russia, Belarus, and other countries. Representatives of various humanistic and scientific disciplines participated in the conference: historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, astronomers, physi-



Discussion "Archeology, Folklore and the Recovery of Past Astronomy and Cosmology". Speeches of Izold Pustylnik (Estonia) (left photo) and SEAC president Juan Antonio Belmonte (Spain) (right photo).

cists, mathematicians. The aim of the research: the search for astronomical knowledge and traces of the practice of observing celestial bodies in spiritual and material cultural heritage, striving to comprehend the worldview of both ancient and current societies. The following themes were examined in the conference:

- Reflections of astronomical and cosmological knowledge in folk culture;
- Astronomical and cosmological knowledge in religion, mythology, and literature;
- Reflections of astronomical and cosmological knowledge in monuments and landscapes;
- Landscape archaeology and archaeoastronomy;
- Archaeology, folklore, and the recovery of past astronomies and cosmologies;
- History of the constellations;
- Astronomical and cosmological iconography;
- Calendars in artefacts, folklore, and literature;
- History of astronomy;
- History of astrology;
- The protection of remnants of interest for the history of astronomy: problems and propositions.

Attention also was paid to archaeoastronomical research methodology; a roundtable discussion entitled “Archaeology, folklore, and the reconstruction of the astronomy and cosmology of the past” was organized. The limits and possibilities of the application of astronomical and cosmological information gleaned from folklore, archaeological material, and historical sources were critically evaluated in the discussion. The



Prof. Dr. Jan Erick Solheim and Sami actor and musician, Ante Mikkell Gaup. Presentation at planetarium show “The Sami hunt of the celestial elk”..

question was raised: In what way can we, and, indeed, can we at all really reconstruct astronomical practices and cosmological knowledge using the limited facts that fall into our hands? A collection of abstracts of the conference’s presentations were published as a separate publication before the conference (Vaitkevičius and Vaiškūnas 2007).



Ritual folk group “Kūlgrinda”; Presentation of Baltic programme for conference participants.

The conference participants had the opportunity to tour the Curonian Spit in-between conference sessions. A two day excursion to get acquainted with Lithuanian cultural heritage monuments was arranged after the conference. Conference participants from Norway presented the Klaipėda and Molėtai community with an original cultural-educational program dedicated to Sami mythical narratives about heaven. Sami story tellers Ante Mikkel Gaup and Øistein Hanssen showed the traditional Sami northern hemisphere constellations in the mobile planetarium and told Sami legends about the starry sky, accompanying the picturesque stories with Sami folk music dedicated to the constellations – *yoik* sounds. This program was presented three times in Klaipėda and six times in Molėtai.

The first global archaeoastronomy conference in Lithuania was a success, although not without the usual difficulties and misunderstandings. The organizers and participants provided a generally creative, industrious, and elated spirits at the conference.

The conference's success was ensured by the good will and support of Klaipėda University's Rector Vidas Žulkus and the enthusiasm of the dedicated workers of the Baltic Sea Region History and Archaeology Institute. We thank the most active conference organizing assistants, the members of the conference's Organizing Committee: M.A. Jurga Žukauskaitė-Alvarez Romero, Dr Vyktas Vaitkevičius, Prof. Dr Algirdas Girininkas, Dr Vytautas Tumėnas, and M.Sc. Jonas Marozas. Thanks also to Prof. Dr Roslyn Frank, Prof. Dr Arnold Lebeuf, Prof. Dr Clive Ruggles, Prof. Dr Steve McCluskey, Dr Michael Rappenglück, Dr Arkadiusz Sołtysiak, and the other members of the conference's Scientific Committee and reviewers who worked very hard so that the scholarly level of the conference could be the highest possible. We thank our colleagues from Norway, Prof. Dr Jan Erick Solhaim, as well as Ante Mikkel Gaup and Øistein Hanssen who enlivened the intensive scientific program of the conference with a very fine cultural program.

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USA scholars Prof. Roslyn M. Frank and Gregory E. Munson receiving powers of the Lithuanian oak.

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