

## SECOND PARTS CAN ALWAYS BE BETTER!



In June 1999, nearly a hundred specialists in the field of cultural astronomy met at the *Museo de la Ciencia y el Cosmos* in Tenerife (Spain) on the occasion of the Oxford VI International Symposium on Archaeoastronomy, which coincided with the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of SEAC. This was a great chance for an important group of researchers from all five continents to meet on the Atlantic coast of Africa and to exchange knowledge and personal impressions throughout a very busy week. In subsequent years, SEAC has continued to hold annual meetings in different European venues (Moscow, Stockholm, Tartu, Leicester, Kecskemet, Isili and Rhodes) and, on most occasions the vast majority, if not all, of the participants came from European countries. On the other hand, most of the participants at the Oxford VII Conference in Flagstaff (Arizona) came from North America, with only a handful from Europe and other areas of the Old World. It was indeed time to repeat the 1999 experiment and to find a good location for it.

The Canary Islands have for a long time formed a bridge straddling Europe and the Americas with strong roots in the African continent. Our venue for the Oxford VIII International Symposium and the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of SEAC also straddles East and West. It is the University of Klaipėda on the Baltic coast of Lithuania. For many centuries during the Middle Ages, this land formed the frontier between Christians and pagans; later, under the framework of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, it stood at the limits of three expanding worldviews – Catholic West, Orthodox East and the Muslim power of the Ottoman Empire. In the present day Lithuania has become the furthest frontier of the European Union. It would have been difficult indeed to find a better place!

At this new opportunity to form a bridge between cultures, the joint Oxford-SEAC Conference has opened

the minds of the participants to a marvellous variety of cultural aspects of astronomy, not only from East and West but worldwide, from the deserts of Australia to the steppes of the Chaco. The conference programme, and the subsequent Proceedings that the reader now has in his or her hands, demonstrate the ability of societies worldwide to deal with the sky and its motions, incorporating these in their folk traditions and deriving from them the facility to produce “artefacts” varying from monumental buildings down to modest wooden calendar sticks, which can be counted among the precious jewels of human heritage. The researchers, who come from all five continents, were skilful in introducing the audience to the minds of these people, not at all an easy task!

I am not going to offer a summary of what we saw and heard throughout six very intensive days of sessions in Klaipėda, since this task was performed marvelously well at the event (and is now presented in this volume) by my colleague Prof. McCluskey, President of ISAAC. However, I should not end without offering our most special acknowledgements to the organizers of the conference. Thanks go to Jurgita Žukauskaitė, our excellent secretary, Vytautas Tumėnas, our “guide”, Vykintas Vaitkevičius, our “public relations officer”, and Algirdas Girininkas for making our stay in Klaipėda, and our lengthy and densely packed excursion across the beautiful lands of Lithuania, an intimate and unforgettable experience. Jonas Vaiškūnas was the spirit and motive force of the conference. He wanted his colleagues to join him in his country, something he had worked hard towards for many years, and he managed to do so in a marvellous way. Congratulations to all of you who gave us the chance to get to know at least part of the soul of Lithuania. Notwithstanding, this volume is the final prize for all of these efforts. Please enjoy it!

Juan Antonio Belmonte, President of SEAC