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Editor Nicholas Campion

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Editorial

This issue of *Culture and Cosmos* contains four articles and one book review which represent a range of topics contained under the general rubric of cultural astronomy. The first paper is an edited and extended update by Fabio Silva of his former blog post on the Sophia Centre Press webpage on the definition of skyscape archaeology, a term now used by some academics as a replacement for archaeoastronomy. The reasoning is that archaeoastronomy tends to be too concerned with the decontextualised measurement of historic sites and pays insufficient attention to wider cultural contexts. Silva also draws attention to the limiting consequences of the use of the word astronomy (p. 5):

The emphasis of astronomy is on an objective reading of an external subject – the sky – itself devoid of meaning. This is achieved through application of the scientific method alone, which helps identify laws that are then formalized mathematically.

This description is filled with uniquely western characteristics: positivism, objectivity, lack of meaning, laws, and mathematics. However, not all societies, present or past, engage with the heavens in this manner, nor would they be interested in this particular form of engagement.

The point is not that scientific method as applied to modern astronomy is not effective, for it quite clearly has been responsible for huge advances our knowledge of beyond-Earth space. The issue is whether narrow understandings of what astronomy is can be projected on to other time periods and cultures. The question is whether modern astronomers

collectively extrapolate from the successes of modern mathematical and observational astronomy in order to make wider epistemological or ontological claims, dealing with the nature of knowledge and being. In other words, what are the cultural contexts of contemporary mathematical and observational astronomy?

Shelly Williams then considers the Christianisation of zodiac iconography, an investigation which crosses the histories of art, religion and material culture. Graeme Tobyn follows with an examination of the medical herbalism of Nicholas Culpeper in the early-mid seventeenth century, at a time when the terms astrology and astronomy could still be interchangeable, and both could be bracketed under mathematics. Laura Andrikopoulos then asks questions about the psychologization of modern western astrology, which itself can be located as a major adaptation of a particularly popular cultural application of astronomy. Lastly, Sylwia Konarska-Zimmicka reviews the new De Gruyter publication, *Prognostication in the Medieval World. A Handbook*, which places the interpretative and predictive uses of medieval astronomy into their wider epistemological or ontological framework, to return to Silva's work.

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