

# CULTURE AND COSMOS

[www.CultureAndCosmos.org](http://www.CultureAndCosmos.org)

**Editor Nicholas Campion**

**Vol. 26 no 1, Spring/Summer 2022**

**ISSN 1368-6534 ISBN 978-1-907767-81-4**

**Published in Partnership with**

The Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology and Culture, Institute of Education  
and Humanities, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

<http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/sophia/>

## **Editorial: Light and Dark**

Light is fundamental to human existence. Not all animal life requires light: angler fish live deep in the dark oceans, around a mile down, and worms can flourish in the soil without ever emerging above the surface. But for humans, light is necessary. In the Jewish scriptures, adopted by Christianity and respected by Islam, darkness was the original condition. God then created light (Genesis 1.1), the individual lights, including the Sun and Moon (Genesis 15-17), and the intermediate, liminal points, morning and evening (Genesis 18). Different traditions have their own narratives, but all are faced with the negotiation of the human relationship with the light giving or reflecting bodies we observe in our sky.

Concern with light, shadow and dark permeates our culture. We could not imagine the visual arts without it. So fundamental is it that London's Tate Gallery has a student resource on the topic.<sup>1</sup> It is central to our understanding of archaeology.<sup>2</sup> The study of archaeoastronomy began as a means of understanding how neolithic Europeans constructed monuments in order to engage their societies with the fluctuation of light and dark, the movement of shadows and of individual lights in the sky.

A pressing issue we face now is the scourge of light pollution and the struggle to retain dark skies. This is partly a heritage issue, as we are increasingly unable to view what was for the whole of human history until

---

<sup>1</sup> Tate Gallery, 'Student Resource: Light and Dark Coursework Guide', <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/student-resource/exam-help/light-and-dark>. [accessed 14 May 2023].

<sup>2</sup> Marion Dowd and Robert Hensey, *The Archaeology of Darkness* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2016).

recent decades a central feature of our culture: the stars. It is also an aesthetic and emotional issue: ‘awe’ of the heavens remains a primary motivation for astronomers.<sup>3</sup> And it is a natural and ecological issue, as permanent or extended periods of light disrupt natural processes.<sup>4</sup>

Sophia Centre graduates have played their part in studying the dark sky problem. Ada Blair’s seminal ethnography, a study of the dark sky reserve on the island of Sark, was published in 2016, while Jessica Heim has raised the damaging consequences of the proposed ‘constellations’ of hundreds, or thousands, of communications satellites.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the papers in this issue were presented at the 17<sup>th</sup> annual Sophia Centre conference, held in 2019, on ‘Light and Dark’.<sup>6</sup> We hope, collectively, all the papers we include will contribute to aspects of our understanding of our relationship with light, dark and the sky.

Nicholas Campion,  
University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

---

<sup>3</sup> William Sheehan, ‘The Importance of Awe: The “11th emotion” got many of us into astronomy. Can children today still experience it?’, International Dark-Sky Association, 13 July 2016, <https://www.darksky.org/the-importance-of-awe/#:~:text=Awe%2C%20the%20emotion%20that%20is%20at%20the%20heart,it%2C%20and%20some%20people%20may%20never%20experience%20it> [accessed 4 May 2023].

<sup>4</sup> F. Hölker, T. Moss, B. Griefahn, W. Kloas, C. C. Voigt, D. Henckel, A. Hänel, P. M. Kappeler, S. Völker, A. Schwope, S. Franke, D. Uhrlandt, J. Fischer, R. Klenke, C. Wolter, and K. Tockner, ‘The dark side of light: a transdisciplinary research agenda for light pollution policy’, *Ecology and Society*, Vol. 15 no 4, 2010, art 13. [online], <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol15/iss4/art13/> [accessed 14 May 2023].

<sup>5</sup> Ada Blair, *Sark in the Dark: Wellbeing and Community of the Dark Sky Island of Sark* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2016); Jessica Heim, ‘Satellites and space junk may make dark night skies brighter, hindering astronomy and hiding stars from our view’, *The Conversation*, 20 March 2023, <https://theconversation.com/satellites-and-space-junk-may-make-dark-night-skies-brighter-hindering-astronomy-and-hiding-stars-from-our-view-202047> [accessed 14 May 2023].

<sup>6</sup> ‘Light and Dark’, 17<sup>th</sup> annual Sophia Centre conference, 2019, <http://sophia-project.net/conferences/conference2019/index.php>.