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Editor Nicholas Campion

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Editorial

This issue of *Culture and Cosmos* consists of twenty-six papers, spread over some 400 pages, from the twelfth conference on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena (INSAPXII) held at the Ionian University in Corfu, Greece, 20-24 May 2024.¹ The conference was brilliantly organised by the local organising committee consisting of Andreas Floros (Rector, Ionian University, Corfu), Konstantinos Vogklis (Data Scientist, Head of Department of Tourism, Ionian University Corfu; Corfiot Astronomical Society), Fiori-Anastasia Metallinou (Astrophysicist, Public Outreach Officer, Institute for Astronomy, Astrophysics, Space Applications and Remote Sensing, part of the National Observatory of Athens), Kosmas Gazeas (Lecturer of Observational Astrophysics, Faculty of Physics, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens), and Sokratis Linardos (Head of the Astronomical Society of Corfu).

The volume is introduced by Valerie Shrimplin on pp. 5-8 and is edited jointly by myself, Chris Impey, John Hatch, Holly Henry and Valerie Shrimplin. The INSAP conferences provide the only regular forum for academics and practitioners to come together to share their work primarily

¹ 'INSAP 2024: Thirty Years of Astronomy, Art and Inspiration', <https://conferences.ionio.gr/insap/> [accessed 10 January 2026].

on astronomy and the artistic and creative fields. As such, they have both helped define the new field of cultural astronomy, and added an important resource to the body of material in culture as a whole. This work has been achieved by all the speakers, and by all the conference organisers who have supported the conferences, including the Ionian University, the University of Arizona, the Vatican Observatory, the Adler Planetarium, L'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Department of Astronomy, University of Padua and the INAF (Osservatorio di Astronomia di Padova Specola Vaticano), the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City, the Centro de Estudios Avanzados, Santiago de Compostela, and the California Institute of Technology (Caltech). A summary is available on the INSAP website.

The current volume is the fourth collection of INSAP conference papers to be published by the Sophia Centre at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, through its almost twenty-five year commitment to teaching and research in cultural astronomy. The first were the proceedings of the INSAP IV conference held at Magdalen College, Oxford on the 3-9 August 2003.² The INSAP website reports:

Breaking with a seeming tradition of holding the INSAP meetings in the Mediterranean region, mainly on islands, the fourth meeting was held in 2003 in the UK in Oxford's lovely Magdalen College, with some functions elsewhere in the Oxford Museums. By now the majority of the presentations were in the arts and the humanities. A special exhibit of works by several of the attending artists was held in the Oxford University Museum. A high point of the meeting was a special full-access dawn tour of Stonehenge and then Avebury [guided by Clive Ruggles] — a day well spent among evidence of the partly astronomically-driven cultural complexity of early Britain.³

² Proceedings of the fourth conference on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena, Magdalen College, Oxford, England, 3–9 August 2003, special issue of *Culture and Cosmos* 8, nos. 1 and 2, Spring/Summer-Autumn/Winter 2004, pp. 45–56. <https://www.cultureandcosmos.org/issues/vol8.php>

³ The Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena, 'History of the Meetings', <https://insap.org/history/> [accessed 10 January 2026].

The second was Volume 16, containing forty papers from the seventh conference (INSAPVII), sponsored by the Sophia Centre with support from the Royal Astronomical Society and the Herschel Museum, Bath, and held at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, Bath, on 24-29 October 2010.⁴ The volume was jointly edited by myself and Rolf Sinclair.

The third volume, papers from the INSAP IX conference, was held at Gresham College, London, 24-27 August 2015 and published as a book by the Sophia Centre Press under the title *Imagining Other Worlds*.⁵ We are planning to make the papers open access in the near future. As the INSAP website records:

Again, the attendees represented a range of regular INSAP attendees as well as a pleasing number of new faces but was slightly smaller having about 60 full participants...the conference was held in the small but amazing fifteenth-century Barnards Inn Hall, where Gresham College (founded 1597) is now located. The highlight of the conference was a special event with Lord Rees of Ludlow, Astronomer Royal, as keynote speaker, followed by a panel discussion involving no fewer than five former Gresham Professors of Astronomy. This event was open to the public as well as conference delegates and attended by some 300 people.⁶

On the Corfu conference, the INSAP website reports that:

The standard of papers and presentations was customarily high, beginning with a Keynote talk by Professor Michael Rowan-Robinson on 'Shakespeare and Astronomy'. The full programme then unfolded with subjects relating to Greece and the Mediterranean area, and then Science and Art topics, including aliens(!) and astrophotography on the first afternoon. Musical contributions happily expanded the usual range of subjects, to be followed (on the second day) by consideration of 3-dimensional and 2-dimensional images of terrestrial and celestial worlds.

⁴ *Culture and Cosmos*, Volume 16 (1 & 2) Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter 2012, <https://www.cultureandcosmos.org/issues/vol16.php>.

⁵ Nicholas Campion and Chris Impey (eds), *Imagining Other Worlds: Explorations in Astronomy and Culture*, (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2018).

⁶ The Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena, 'History of the Meetings', <https://insap.org/history/> [accessed 10 January 2026].

Presentations of teaching and outreach activities in astronomy started off the third day, followed by history-themed sessions on the medieval period, the Renaissance and some global topics from Mexico to Arabia. The last day focussed on contemporary and modern art and literature, ending up with some religious and spiritual themes and a fantastic digital presentation on ‘Spirits Dancing – A Night Sky Experience.’⁷

The papers contain the wide range of topics that have become familiar as the hallmark of the INSAP approach to astronomy and culture: astronomy and literature, novels and poetry, music, painting, sculpture and the decorative arts and, of course, the sky, planets, stars and astronomical phenomena as a source of inspiration. Given the range of topics we have roughly grouped the papers into two. The first part, from paper #3 (Valerie Shrimplin on ‘Byron’s Starry Skies’) concerns the past and the second part, from paper #15 (S.G. Djorgovski on ‘Imagining the Alien’) is on the modern and contemporary worlds.

Culture and Cosmos also will be publishing an anthology from the INSAP XIII conference, ‘Celestial Connections Across Time and Space’, which was held at Queen's University Belfast on 8-13 June 2025.⁸

Lastly, we are looking forward to the INSAPXIV conference currently scheduled for Rome in October 2026, for which full information will be available soon.

Nicholas Campion,
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⁷ The Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena, ‘History of the Meetings’, <https://insap.org/history/> [accessed 10 January 2026].

⁸ *Celestial Connections Across Time and Space*, The 13th International Conference on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena, 8-13 June 2025, Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom. <https://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/ael/Research/ConferencesandSymposia/INSAP2025/> [accessed 10 January 2026].