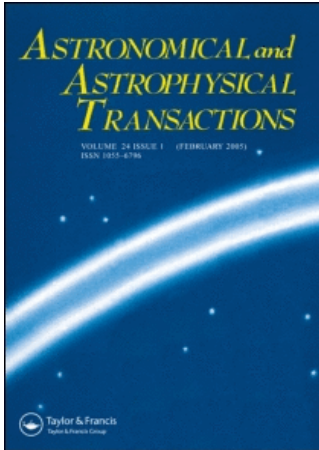


This article was downloaded by:[Bochkarev, N.]
On: 11 December 2007
Access Details: [subscription number 746126554]
Publisher: Taylor & Francis
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Astronomical & Astrophysical Transactions

The Journal of the Eurasian Astronomical Society

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713453505>

SEAC-2001 "SYMBOLS, CALENDARS AND ORIENTATIONS: LEGACIES OF ASTRONOMY IN CULTURE"

I. Pustynnik ^a

^a Tartu Observatory, 61602, Estonia.

Online Publication Date: 01 January 2002

To cite this Article: Pustynnik, I. (2002) 'SEAC-2001 "SYMBOLS, CALENDARS AND ORIENTATIONS: LEGACIES OF ASTRONOMY IN CULTURE"', *Astronomical & Astrophysical Transactions*, 21:1, 155 - 158

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/10556790215585

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10556790215585>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article maybe used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.



SEAC-2001 “SYMBOLS, CALENDARS AND ORIENTATIONS: LEGACIES OF ASTRONOMY IN CULTURE”

I. PUSTYLNİK

Tartu Observatory, 61602, Estonia

(Received 3 January 2002)

The IXth Annual Meeting of SEAC (Society for European Astronomy in Culture) was held on 27–30th of August 2001 in Stockholm in the Old Stockholm Observatory. It is difficult to imagine a better place for SEAC Meeting in the Swedish capital. Located at the highest point of the Observatory Hill it gives a splendid panoramic view of the city. The foundations of the observatory were laid down in 1748 by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Today this building holds a museum dedicated to the history of science. Peter Wilhelm Wargentin, the Secretary General of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, one of the most outstanding scientists of his time in the field of astronomy and meteorology, lived and worked since 1753 in the observatory. Today the visitor to the museum can enjoy a display of uninterrupted records of the temperature measurements conducted in the observatory for two and half centuries, the panoramic exhibit of a memorable Venus transit on the 6th of June 1760 with many celebrities standing in the dome to watch a historic event, and many old instruments which were in use in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Local Organizing Committee (M. Blomberg, G. Henriksson, P. Blomberg) had done a great amount of a preparatory work to ensure successful organization of all the aspects of the conference. The meeting had been sponsored by the Swedish Research Council and other organizations which enabled also a small number of grants for young participants and researchers from East European countries. A rich cultural program included also a reception at the Town Hall hosted by the mayor of Stockholm, a memorable excursion in the historical building with a visit to the ceremonial hall where the Nobel Prize winners receive their awards. In addition an excursion to Old Uppsala was held where participants could visit a Gustavianum Uppsala University museum and attended the public lecture by the distinguished researcher in the field of archaeoastronomy C. Ruggles from Leicester University (UK) dedicated to the history and the current state of investigations of the famous Stonehenge. After the completion of the official scientific program of SEAC-2001 many attendees took part in a two day excursion to Norrköpping and Falköping in the southern regions of Sweden where they had a rare opportunity to visit numerous sites with passage graves, petroglyphs, runic stones and other archaeoastronomical relics. It was rewarding and reassuring to see

how many enthusiasts, both young and old, attracted by the rich cultural legacy of Scandinavia on a volunteer basis spend much time and effort on a careful preservation of their glorious past.

The Scientific agenda of SEAC-2001 consisted of five sessions with scientific contributions and discussions concentrated around the following topics: 1. History and Iconography of the Constellations, 2. Astronomy in religion, mythology and literature, 3. Calendars in artefacts, folklore and literature, 4. Orientations and their interpretation, 5. Swedish archaeology and astronomy in culture. Time and time again the SEAC Meeting produced a rich variety of topics despite the limited number of participants (about 35 attendees representing 17 countries), geography of submitted topics ranged from Siberia to America and from Laplandia to New Zealand. Although English, as usual, was an official language of IXth SEAC Meeting there were some noteworthy exceptions. Thus, J. Vaiškunas (Lithuania) presented his interesting report dedicated to summer solstice festival traditions in Lithuania known under the popular name “the dancing Sun” in Russian, whereas R. Perkowski (Poland) who is interested in the ideas of cosmos in French literature of the middle ages submitted his contribution in the original language of his subject.

Bearing in mind the venue of the SEAC Meeting it is only natural that the latter, fifth session attracted a special attention from the audience. The central part in it occupied a discussion of runic calendar sticks (S-G. Hollonquist) as well as the contribution dedicated to the astronomical aspects of Saami drums (B. Sommarström). The artefacts of the runic culture, mostly the runic stones and sticks are scattered over a large area in Europe. They have been found not only in Scandinavia but in Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, England, Estonia and even in Italy. According to S-G. Hollonquist the oldest and well studied runic stones found on Swedish territory date back to 1250–1275 AD. Several investigators studying the runic alphabet have found evidence for its continuous evolution through the middle ages. One of the most spectacular exhibitions of the runic sticks is permanently on display in the Museum Gustavianum in Uppsala. It possesses exceptional specimens of runic sticks with the incisions denoting “the eternal calendar” containing both designations of solar and lunar calendars as well as the cyclic relationship between 19 solar years and 235 lunar months as one cycle. In addition some of the runic sticks or, as they are called sometimes, runestaffs have incisions marking the “sacred days” all over the year, like festivities dedicated to certain saints, also the times to sow plants, to launch a boat, to make hay etc. Remarkably many farmers have had in their possession personal runic sticks which they used to bring with them to church every Sunday. According to J. Belmonte (Spain) some investigators find in runic alphabet and artefacts certain common features with the Etruscan culture. A 79 years old researcher (!) of Saami culture B. Sommarström (Sweden) in his highly emotional and richly illustrated presentation not only demonstrated to the audience the genuine Saami drum but armed with a twig made a small performance with it. He spent a lot of time studying the ethnoastronomical prospectives of Saamis’ religion based on a rich collection of 75 Saami drums preserved since 17th and 18th centuries from the Nordic region. Many of the drums reveal a painted square-cross tree in the middle with numerous figurines around it. They are perceived by the veteran Swedish researcher both as cardinal points of a geographic division and as the Sun’s beams emanating from the center of the drum. It became clear from the contribution of B. Sommarström and private conversations with him, that the mysteries of resettling Saami in subpolar regions of the globe following the last retreat of the polar glaciers are far from being resolved.

Such a classical branch of archaeoastronomy as the study of orientations of sanctuaries, churches, passage graves etc. have not in the least lost their importance in the broad spectrum of topics dealt with in archaeoastronomical research. This was clearly in evidence in the presentations of S. Iwaniszewski, C. Ruggles, M. Blomberg, L. Marsadalov, J. Lindström,

G. Henriksson. To pay a tribute to the SEAC-2001 organizers we briefly summarize some of the results reported in Stockholm by the last two speakers. J. Lindström choose a sample of 204 graves from 33 cemeteries in the vicinity of Stockholm dating to a period around 1000 AD to study the orientation of the Viking age inhumation graves. As the result of these excavations the clustering of the graves around East-North-East direction was firmly established. G. Henriksson has confirmed the recorded data that a periodical sacrifice of humans and animals in the vicinity of Uppsala happened every eighth year in the early middle ages with the phases of full moon and established that these events occurred in the midwinter, thus the first day of the sacrificial period should be 28th of January.

Etymology and the origin of the stellar maps from ancient Egypt and Babylon still attract much attention of investigators which was clearly manifested in many interesting contributions (A. Kuzmin, A. Lushnikova, P. Blomberg, J. Belmonte, E. Kaurov, M. Moss and R. Hannah). In this context it is especially meaningful that more and more researchers try to work with original sources. This was exemplified, for instance, in presentations of the young Swedish egyptologist P. Wallin who tries to retrieve astronomical concepts of regeneration from the ancient Egyptian coffin texts and in the talk submitted by an experienced researcher J. Belmonte (Spain) who "resurrects" the significance of the so-called Decans, a belt of the asterisms whose heliacal rise was used for time keeping since the end of the Old Kingdom but lost their value in the New Kingdom.

Another traditional branch of archaeoastronomy—calendars and calendar systems, chronology of historic events in their multifold relations with socioeconomic and religious doctrines of a specific epoch were presented in several contributions (H. Gropp, M. Frenkel, M. Rappenglück). Thus, the German mathematician and historian of science H. Gropp dedicated his presentation to the well-known artefact of an early Celtic astronomical culture—the two thousand year old Coligny calendar uncovered in 1897 in south-eastern France. At least four books dedicated to this exceptional calendar have been published during the last decade discussing the different aspects of this unique artefact.

E. Kaurov (Russia) presented a systematic overview of the research activities in the area of archaeoastronomy in Russia embracing roughly the period of the last five years and the relevant scientific conferences held in Russia but with a considerable contribution from researchers in the new independent states once belonging to FSU. L. Marsadalov working for the world-renowned State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg in a richly illustrated talk, familiarized attendees with one of the best known megalithic monuments of Siberia, the great Salbyk barrow which dates probably to the 5th century BC. By its monumental construction it can be put into the same category of objects as the famous Stonehenge. Therefore it is regrettable that according to a bitter testimony of the Russian scholar (voiced during a private discussion) with each new visit to this famous site he witnesses the traces of a fresh destruction inflicted by modern barbarians, the negligence and the apparent indifference of the local authorities to restoration of this unique sanctuary.

For more than a decade such mentors of archaeoastronomy like C. Ruggles (UK) and N.J. Saunders (USA) have held heated debates over the methodological issues of this discipline and its classification criteria. The contributions like the one presented in Stockholm by B. Rappenglück (Germany), in view of the undersigned, clearly demonstrate why such type of research sometimes may nonplus those who advocate a systematized approach in archaeoastronomy and why no final consensus has been reached here up to now. In her presentation under a provocative title "The power of binding—ropes establish the cosmic order", B. Rappenglück analyzed a lot of mythological materials—the legacy of many nations over the globe, also specimens of the fine art and presented the results of her analysis on the role of ropes symbolizing in her interpretation astronomical phenomena by "binding the earth to the sky", by manipulating of cosmic movements by the means of ropes etc. It

is legitimate to ask: does this piece of analysis really belong to a scientific pursuit, or to a realm of art, or is it a critical essay, or one has rather to deal with elements of all three amalgamated by a virtue of historical and philosophical insight? Whatever will be the answer one should give credit to the organizers of the conference and authorities of SEAC who demonstrated their openmindedness and invited lively discussions over the broad spectrum of topics relevant to ethno- and archaeoastronomy and making thereby the Stockholm Meeting a memorable milestone in a short history of the European Society of Astronomy in Culture.

A number of important questions have been raised during the business Meeting, held immediately after the closing scientific session of SEAC-2001. Most of the participants in course of the discussions have concentrated on the problem—how to increase visibility of activities conducted by SEAC, to establish and preserve high standards of SEAC conferences and published proceedings. To this end several speakers have discussed the prospects of introducing regular electronic Newsletters dedicated to various problems of archaeoastronomy, improving the quality of the Home Page of SEAC by adding a considerable amount of useful links to related organizations and topics of investigation. One of the serious problems preoccupying the minds of the SEAC Executive Committee members is the peer review of the contributions submitted for a publication in the volume of proceedings which has become an established tradition of SEAC Meetings. The last volume based on SEAC-2000 Meeting in Moscow has been submitted to the publishers and should appear in 2002. The papers based on oral contributions presented at SEAC-2001 Meeting will also be published, and all the papers will be scrutinized by the panel of experts and editors.

During the business meeting it has been decided to introduce a memorial award in honour of Carlos Jashek, the founder of SEAC, to encourage introduction of new concepts and ideas of originality and quality in archaeoastronomy. In view of the incoming re-elections during the next Xth SEAC Meeting of the Executive Committee and the President, a Nominating Committee has been appointed including M. Stavinschi (Romania) and K. Barlai (Hungary).

The next Xth SEAC Meeting is scheduled for the last week of August 2002 to be held in Tartu, Estonia (the contact persons are Mrs. M. Kõiva, Estonian Literature Museum and I. Pustylnik, Tartu Observatory, Estonia).