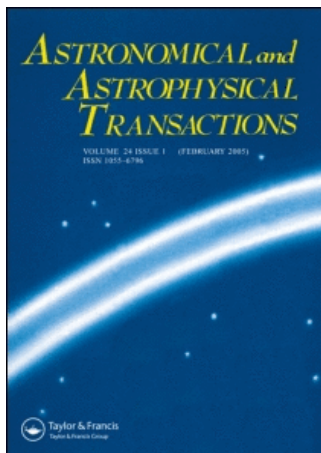


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10TH SEAC ANNUAL MEETING

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10TH SEAC ANNUAL MEETING

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The 10th SEAC Annual Meeting and the accompanying colloquium entitled *Cultural Context for the Archaeoastronomical Data and the Echoes of Cosmic Catastrophic Events* (for brevity we shall mostly use the acronym SEAC 2002) was held in Tartu, Estonia on August 27–30, 2002. The Scientific Organizing Committee of SEAC 2002 included I. Pustylnik (Estonia, Chairman), S. Iwaniszewski (Vice-Chairman, Mexico and Poland), and the members K. Barlai (Hungary), J. Belmonte (Spain), M. Blomberg (Sweden), R. Frank (USA), M. Kõiva (Estonia), T. Potemkina (Russia) and C. Ruggles (UK). M. Kõiva headed the LOC of SEAC 2002. In view of the interdisciplinary nature of the SEAC 2002 colloquium, two institutions were appointed as responsible for the organization: Tartu Observatory and the Estonian Literary Museum. The authorities of both institutions provided moral and logistic support for SEAC 2002. Financial support came basically from the Estonian Science Foundation and Estonian Cultural Endowment and to a smaller extent from several sponsors. The wife of the Estonian President Mrs Ingrid Rüütel, PhD, was the official patroness of SEAC 2002.

About 40 scholars from 15 nations (mostly from Europe) participated in SEAC 2002. Both Russia and Estonia were represented by six registered participants, Hungary, Poland and Sweden by four each, and Germany and Lithuania by two attendees. During the four working days, six scientific sessions were held:

- (i) alignments and orientations in megalithic monuments and burials;
- (ii) eclipses, Aurora Borealis and meteorites as messengers of imminent global catastrophe;
- (iii) history and iconography of constellations;
- (iv) archaeoastronomical monuments as ancient observatories;
- (v) calendars in artefacts, folklore and literature;
- (vi) astronomical knowledge retrieved from artefacts and analysis of ancient folklore.

About 40 contributions have been submitted for SEAC 2002. In addition a round-table discussion entitled ‘The origin of constellations: methodological questions’ was organized (moderator R. Frank, USA and Spain). The colloquium was followed by a 2 day excursion to the beautiful island of Saaremaa guided by a professional archaeologist M. Mägi and a geologist Ülo Kestlane. During the excursion, participants visited the medieval castle–museum

Kuresaare, many ancient burial places and fortified settlements and finally the site of the most recent meteorite impact in Europe (according to the most recent estimates the event occurred in approximately 600 BC; for more details see <http://www.saaremaa.ee>) in Kaali. In this way, M. Mägi found herself in the most privileged position, being the only participant of SEAC 2002 who could illustrate her scientific contribution with the *in-situ* inspection of the numerous archaeological excavations.

As a novelty in the short history of SEAC annual meetings the hosts organized three art exhibitions which were permanently on display during SEAC 2002 in the foyer of Estonian Literary Museum: the first by Kärt Summatavet, Associate Professor, Department of Metal Art, Estonian Academy of Art, where art is based on Estonian and Finno-Ugric mythology and folk art; the second 'Rock art' by Estonian freelance graphic designer Loit Jõekalda; third entitled 'What did rock carvings look like in prehistoric times?' by Finnish artist Eikki Luoma-aho. A different kind of exhibition was on display at the stellarium of Tartu Observatory in Tõravere. It was dedicated to the life and scientific legacy of Tartu astronomer, Heino Eelsalu, a well-known specialist in stellar statistics, a historian and a pioneer of palaeoastronomical studies in Estonia. The history of those studies was reviewed in a presentation of A. Kuperjanov (Estonian Literary Museum).

During the business meeting, SEAC members approved the minutes of the last SEAC Annual Conference held in Stockholm. A number of questions regulating activities of the SEAC organization between its annual conferences were raised and discussed. A volume of the *Proceedings of the 8th SEAC Annual Meeting* in Moscow has been published and circulated among the participants of SEAC 2002 whereas the volume of the last 9th SEAC Annual Meeting in Stockholm is still in preparation and should appear very soon. It has been announced that the next (11th) SEAC Annual Meeting should take place early in August 2003 jointly with the Oxford Meeting on Archaeoastronomy held regularly once in 4 years whereas the 12th SEAC Annual Meeting is scheduled for the year 2004 in Hungary. The *Proceedings of the 10th Annual SEAC Meeting* will be published in Estonia; the editors of the volume are M. Kõiva (Estonian Literary Museum) and I. Pustylnik (Tartu Observatory, Estonia). Here are the highlights from some talks. Two invited discourses by C. Ruggles (UK), 'Balancing oral history with alignments studies: the temple platforms of Maui', and by S. Iwaniszewski (Poland and Mexico) 'Anticipating catastrophes and predicting the future: calendarical-astronomical cycles in Mesoamerica', were presented at SEAC 2002. Both were characterized by a balanced approach in their studies where alignment problems of ancient monuments of natural landscape are inextricably related to the cultural traditions and beliefs of the indigenous nations populating the area. Both investigate archaeoastronomical evidence in cultures far beyond the European continent. Thus, Iwaniszewski analysed in detail the idea that some prominent landmarks of distant horizons in Mesoamerica could have served as markers of different positions of sunrise and sunset through the year and that those dates were arranged according to the structure of the Mesoamerican calendar. He presented arguments in favour of the idea that those horizon calendars were used for calculating astronomical divinatory intervals of time important for rain-bringing ceremonies.

J.E. Solheim (Norway) presented a picturesque review (including a DVD film) of a natural phenomenon, namely the Northern Lights, their dynamics, temporal variations in relation to the solar cycle and the motion of the magnetic pole and reflection in the cultures of the Nordic people, specifically in their religion beliefs, art and folklore, both ancient and modern. N. Bochkarev (Russia) made a report and presented a video dedicated to a rare archaeoastronomical monument Carahunge in Armenia which resembles Stonehenge and most probably served as an ancient cult place and observatory dating back to the third or second millennium BC. This monument is located on the eastern slope of Zangezour mountain ridge at an altitude

1770 m above the sea level, about 200 km from Jerevan, the capital of Armenia. The monument is in a bad need of protection from destruction. T. Potemkina (Russia) summarized multifold evidence suggesting that at the turn of the fourth and third millennia BC the population inhabiting the Trans-Ural region on the river Tobol was already familiar with the threefold model of the world. She presented some results of her analysis based on various artefacts, which demonstrates parallels in beliefs and cults of the Ob-Ugrians and peoples speaking Indo-Iranian languages, thereby testifying in her opinion to permanent long-term contacts between these ethnic-linguistic communities as early as 5000 years ago. N. Bekbassar (Kazakhstan) presented to the audience the legends of nomadic Turkish tribes, specifically Kazahhs associated with the celestial luminaries and described how they assisted his ancestors in seasonal migrations, accomplishing various tasks related to the cattle breeding and agriculture. J. Vaiškunas (Lithuania) studied the meaning of the ornamentation found on Lithuanian distaffs; he presented many different convincing arguments to support the idea that the ensemble of distaff symbols represents the imaginary structure of the world.

The iconography of constellations invariably attracts the attention of investigators. SEAC 2002 was not an exception to this rule. In at least four contributions by M. Blomberg (Sweden), A. Lushnikova (Russia), I. Pustynnik (Estonia) and E. Kaurov (Russia) the problems of etymology of constellations have been under discussion. Another traditional branch of archaeoastronomical research, namely the alignments of burial places, monuments, cult places, etc., was represented by an even larger number of presentations. Apart from the two invited discourses already mentioned, these topics were treated in talks by J. Belmonte (Spain), M. Blomberg, G. Henriksson (Sweden), E. Pasztor (Hungary), K. Barlai (Hungary), M. Pocs (Hungary) and M. Mägi (Estonia).

It is noteworthy that the problems of the world outlook and astronomical context retrieved from analysis of ancient folklore becomes ever more popular in archaeoastronomical and ethnoastronomical studies. SEAC 2002 serves as a good illustration to this tendency. In addition to the above-mentioned presentations by T. Potemkina and J. Vaiškunas the problems of early cosmogony were covered in a number of presentations during SEAC 2002 by J. Jaaniste (Estonia), M. Kõiva (Estonia), K. Tumenas (Lithuania), M. Ziolkowski (Poland), A. Soltysiak (Poland), M. Rappenglück (Germany) and B. Rappenglück (Germany).

Somewhat surprisingly, the once popular and traditional topic of calendars and calendrical systems were discussed in only three contributions, by G. Henriksson (Bulgaria), N. Sivkov (Bulgaria) and A. Davletshin (Russia). Although the topic of cosmic catastrophes figured prominently in the announced agenda of SEAC 2002, it attracted relatively little attention from the attendees of SEAC 2002. Apart from above-mentioned presentation by J.-E. Solheim it was a specific topic of discussion in the contributions by the veteran of SEAC, A. Lebeuf (Poland), and a group of Greek authors S. Theodossiou, V. Manimanis and P. Niarchos.

Finally the originally planned session entitled 'Rock art in a cosmic prospective' was cancelled because of the lack of interest from potential contributors. However, although it disappeared from the scientific agenda it 'emerged' in the form of the art exhibitions already described above.