

## AFTERWORD

### Rome, 26 years after: a (not so) critical view

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I had the great chance to be for the first time in Rome in 1989 as part of a student trip in Italy with my high-school mates. We were there for the Carnival and young as we were those were big words. I remember that I was captivated by the sheer magnificence of the Baroque buildings, the elegance of the Renaissance palaces and the awesome Medieval churches, but what really clang me was the fact that the ancient Romans, those that once endeavoured to conquest the Mediterranean, crossing the sea and arriving at my homeland, Spain, more than 2000 years before, were there at full sight in the magnificent ruins of the Forae, Termae, Walls... Of course I was at the Fontana di Trevi (then dry and under restoration works) and I was then prompted to return.

I was then decided to study Physics to become an astronomer, but I am sure that my deep interest in archaeology was then boosted by this visit to the Roman past. It is then with great pleasure that, 26 years after, I intend to do a critical view as one of the co-editors of this volume with the papers resulting from the SEAC meeting held at La Sapienza during November 2015.

The XXIII meeting held in Rome completely fulfilled its role as a venue for discussion on on-going research on Cultural Astronomy, with talks not only devoted to past and present European cultural astronomy manifestations but also with a wide variety of talks dealing with different topics. These ranged from broad methodological issues to new technologies applied to archaeoastronomical research and cultural astronomy research done by European researchers in other continents or by researchers from other areas participating in our meeting. I truly believe this mixture provided the meeting with a wealth of topics and perspectives that enriched the discussions inside and outside the meeting room.

It is a signal of good health that the topics are departing from the two main subjects of the discipline for the last 20 years or so: megalithic astronomy and the data recollection. The first has been the main theme for just 5 papers out of the 70 presented in this volume. I find that the discipline has finally diversified the scope of interest, not just looking at the possible orientation of megalithic monuments as a challenge to be faced but looking at various directions to explore how the sky was entangled with the everyday life of the different societies across time and space. However, megalithic astronomy deserves to be treated carefully. Without denying the benefits from past efforts on the verification of the intentionality new efforts to apprehend the intent must be undertaken. Of course, one has to be careful with the methodology employed in pursuing such task, as it is easy to fall in over-subjectivism.

The second issue, the data recollection, still present in many of the studies in the meeting, is a valid and needed step in many cases to prove the intentionality, but it is surely one that has to give way to interpretations about the intent based on the anthropologic, archaeological and historical records if Cultural Astronomy is intended to advance. As we see, the two issues are intertwined.

In this sense, I'd like to comment a recent paper by Kristiansen (2014). There he shows that if the objectivist ideal of procesualism is long ago over, it is also clear that the subjectivist version of post-procesualism or the post-modern hermeneutic liberalism are not the solution. The increase in the critic reflexivity as a central ingredient in all theories and practices, and the consolidation of a soft science model (rigorous data, robust methodologies and reflexive theories; the so-called R3 science), open a new path to inclusive proposals that Kristiansen exemplifies in his 'new paradigm' for Archaeology.

Kristiansen proposal combines the scientific potential of the archaeological research (big data, profound archaeometries, information technologies, visualization technologies) and the solid theories to produce significant narratives. This attempt must be oriented towards solving the problems of the archaeological investigations in a confluence of the anthropologic points of view with the 'hard' sciences.

In my view, Cultural Astronomy is in a good position to tackle such integration. The use of empirical big data, innovative visualization techniques (as in the 3D reconstruction of buildings and their integration in a planetarium software) together with ever-stronger theoretical basis, allow building narratives that give an integral sense to the social study of the skies. Of course, this is not the only way

forward, but is one that might integrate a large part of our community along the intentionality and the intent of orientations.

The Rome meeting dealt with a large variety of themes. Besides the now classical studies on Babylonian or Egyptian astronomy we find true attempts to do archaeoastronomy in the Levant and Near East despite the dangerous situation in the field. Church orientation and light and shadow effects within churches is becoming a hot topic in the last meetings with a number of different perspectives that are very much welcome. The Roman cultural astronomy has entered with great momentum in the scene but it is yet to be seen if this is an effect of the location of the venue or if it will be there for the future. More anthropologically based studies have also been present, with a session on Bear and the sky in Europe, or those on American cultural astronomy studies.

New researchers are approaching the discipline from the different fields such as astronomy, anthropology, archaeology, and history... It has been encouraging to see several young researchers, presenting their results on the orientation of churches, Armenian cosmology or the Roman in the Near East, to name just a few. However, a lot more work has to be done in the future to encourage doctorate students to participate and publish their results.

On the back side this has been the third SEAC meeting in a row to be held in a western European country (after Athens 2013 and Malta 2014) and there are at least two more to come in West Europe: Bath 2016 and Santiago 2017. Is this a problem? Indeed, this is a new situation because up to now, there had been the agreement to hold meetings in western and eastern countries almost alternatively to encourage the participation from nationals from all countries in Europe. The participants from the host country are always a majority and there is a budget of people that tend to attend regularly to almost every meeting. However, it is true that there is a lack of participants from Eastern Europe, something that must be care for in the future. Another problem, perhaps derived from the above, is the lack of initiative to propose venues in eastern countries in the last General Assemblies, where most proposals came from the countries that are now organizing the meetings.

A lapse of two decades is short for a city such as Rome but is a long time in the life of a person or a Society! Experience turns into looking at things that you already know with new eyes. We must look into our past to learn and grow, and I believe our Society has done so in the last 23 years. Today, the yearly meeting of SEAC is probably one of the highlights of Astronomy in Culture not only in Europe but also worldwide.

Being part of the meeting in Rome has been a real pleasure for me. Before returning to Santiago, the last day of my stay in Rome, I visited the newly restored Fontana di Trevi. I'm sure I will be returning to the Eternal City soon!

## REFERENCES

- Kristiansen, K. (2014) Towards a New Paradigm? The Third Science Revolution and its Possible Consequences in Archaeology. *Current Swedish Archaeology*, 22, 11-34.