

Beginner's Reading List of Books on Archaeoastronomy

(compiled by Irene Earis)

When people get interested in the subject of archaeoastronomy for the first time, they naturally want some suggestions about which books to read. Below is therefore a short, highly selective list of possible books that you might want to buy or borrow from a library to start with. They are basically the ones I have personally found most helpful.

There are various points to make, however, before you begin. First, books on prehistoric archaeology may describe sites, discuss chronologies and make guesses about the type of society that produced aligned monuments. But don't expect references to astronomy. Most archaeologists simply do not look at the monuments in the context of their landscape settings. Prehistoric archaeology books can therefore tell you many facts about your chosen site and the other monuments in the area, but you will almost always have to add the astronomy yourself.

If you are not a mathematician or astronomer, be prepared too for the fact that specialist books on archaeoastronomy can often look difficult to comprehend, but don't let that put you off. The sight of equations on a page does not mean that you will not be able to tackle the rest of the book you find them in. Approach the subject a little at a time and then gradually look in these books to find answers to your questions as they arise.

My suggestion is that you begin with reference books to particular types of site or particular countries and areas. For example, Aubrey Burl's books on stone circles or rows of standing stones will always be useful and will give you ideas about places to visit and what to expect when you reach a site. County histories often include lists of ancient sites as well.

To inspire you there are also books which are quite possible for a layperson to read and enjoy such as Magli's book *Mysteries and Discoveries of Archaeoastronomy* or Graham Hancock's *Heaven's Mirror* (see below for details).

Then Robin Heath's books offer a comprehensive guide to the whole subject. My favourites are *Sun, Moon and Stonehenge* and his biography of Professor Thom, *Cracking the Stone Age Code*, which also contains all you need to know to start out with. Robin's books were certainly the ones that helped me to understand the subject most clearly.

The books of archaeologist Professor Euan MacKie are also a rare example of an expert in archaeology who has studied the astronomy as well. Try, for example, *Science and Society in Prehistoric Britain*.

There are very few general astronomy books in this list, because the geocentric astronomy needed to appreciate the prehistoric sites involves a different approach to that of modern astronomers. But, of course, the greater your knowledge of the skies, the more you will enjoy getting out of doors and watching sun and moon rises and sets.

If you get interested and start searching for books, you will also quickly come across the name of Clive Ruggles, who became the only professor of archaeoastronomy in Britain (at Leicester University). His books contain much interesting detail, but his general approach to the subject is ultra-cautious and he is usually reluctant to commit himself to the possibility of deliberate alignments. He is always worried that they may be coincidental. My advice would be to use the factual information he presents in his books and articles, but question his conclusions and ignore his sidetracks into statistics and probability theories which just add more layers of problems to solve beyond the astronomy itself.

There is also an international journal produced in America, simply called *Archaeoastronomy*, which issues occasional editions, mostly about sites in the Americas.

The list below is blatantly subjective and deliberately short since it is designed for beginners. However, some of the scholarly works referred to contain extensive bibliographies which you can browse through later if you want. Be aware, also, that many of these books are now out of print and you will therefore have to search for second hand copies.

General Archaeological Reference books:

Burl, Aubrey (1993). *From Carnac to Callanish. The Prehistoric Stone Rows and Avenues of Britain, Ireland and Brittany*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Burl, Aubrey (1995). *A Guide to the Stone Circles of Britain, Ireland and Brittany*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Canby, Courtlandt (1988). *A Guide to the Archaeological Sites of the British Isles*. New York and Oxford: A Hudson Group Book. (old but useful gazetteer)

Cope, Julian (1998). *The Modern Antiquarian*. London: Thorsons. (a subjective and unacademic presentation of a wide range of prehistoric sites, with fascinating photographs).

Cope, Julian (2004). *The Megalithic European*. London: Element. (as above – quirky and personal but lavishly illustrated).

Harding, Jan (2003). *Henge Monuments of the British Isles*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus.

Service, Alastair and Bradbery, Jean (1981). *A Guide to the Megaliths of Europe*. St.Albans: Granada.

General introductory reading:

Aveni, Anthony (2008). *People and the Sky. Our Ancestors and the Cosmos*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Bauval, Robert and Gilbert, Adrian (1994). *The Orion Mystery. Unlocking the Secrets of the Pyramids*. London: Heinemann. (an example of the many books on Egyptian archaeoastronomy).

Brennan, Martin (1994). *The Stones of Time (Calendars, Sundials and Stone Chambers of Ancient Ireland)*. Inner Traditions Bear and Company.

Brown, Peter Lancaster (1976). *Megaliths, Myths and Men. An Introduction to Astro-Archaeology*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

Burl, Aubrey (1983). *Prehistoric Astronomy and Ritual*. Aylesbury, Bucks: Shire Archaeology.

Calvin, William H. (2001). *How the Shaman Stole the Moon*. USA: An Authors Guild Backinprint.com edition. (working out the problems of archaeoastronomy from first principles, especially at sites in the USA).

Haagensen, Erling and Lincoln, Henry (2000). *The Templar's Secret Island*. London: Cassell. (Medieval geometric surveying on Bornholm in the Baltic)

Hadingham, Evan (1983). *Early Man and the Cosmos*. London: Heinemann.

Hancock, Graham and Faiia, Santha (1998). *Heaven's Mirror. Quest for the Lost Civilization*. London: Penguin.

Heath, Robin (1998). *Sun, Moon and Stonehenge*. Cardigan, Wales: Bluestone Press.

Heath, Robin and Michell, John (2004). *The Measure of Albion*. Cardigan, Wales: Bluestone Press. (this book concentrates on the related subject of metrology – the development of systems of measurement and units of measure).

Heggie, Douglas C. (1981). *Megalithic Science*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Heggie, Douglas C. (ed.) (1982). *Archaeoastronomy in the Old World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (a collection of short academic articles)

Krupp, Dr.E.C. (1983). *Echoes of the Ancient Skies. The astronomy of lost civilizations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MacKie, Euan W. (1977). *Science and Society in Prehistoric Britain*. London: Elek.

Magli, Giulio (English edn. 2009). *Mysteries and Discoveries of Archaeoastronomy. From Giza to Easter Island*. New York: Copernicus Books.

North, John. (1996). *Stonehenge: A New Interpretation of Prehistoric Man and the Cosmos*. New York: The Free Press. (not just on Stonehenge, despite its title!)

Santillana, Giorgio de and Dechend, Hertha von (1969). *Hamlet's Mill*. Boston, USA: Godine. (Difficult but hugely influential book about astronomy and myth)

Temple, Robert (1999). *The Crystal Sun*. London: Arrow. (A fascinating book arguing that glass lenses may have been used in prehistory).

Wood, John Edwin (1978). *Sun, Moon and Standing Stones*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (a good basic textbook)

Some background books on archaeology:

Hayman, Richard (1997). *Riddles in Stone. Myths, Archaeology and the Ancient Britons*. London: The Hambleton Press.

Johnson, Matthew (1999). *Archaeological Theory. An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Russell, Miles (2002). *Monuments of the British Neolithic*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus.

Some useful books on individual sites and countries:

Aveni, Anthony F. (2001). *Skywatchers. Revised version of Skywatchers of Ancient Mexico*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.

Fell, Barry (1989). *America BC*. New York: Pocket Books.

Freeman, Gordon R. (2009). *Canada's Stonehenge*. Canada: Kingsley Publishing.

Hoskin, Michael (2001). *Tombs, Temples and their Orientations. A New Perspective on Mediterranean Prehistory*. Bognor Regis: Ocarina Books.

O'Kelly, Michael J. (1982). *Newgrange. Archaeology, art and legend*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Mann, Nicholas R. & Glasson, Philippa (2007). *The Star Temple of Avalon. Glastonbury's Ancient Observatory Revealed*. Wells, Somerset: The Temple Publications.

Patton, Mark; Rodwell, Warwick and Finch, Olga (1999). *La Hougue Bie. Jersey*. Jersey: Societe Jersiaise.

Ponting, Gerald and Ponting, Margaret (2000). *New Light on the Stones of Callanish*. Stornaway: G & M Ponting.

Ruggles, Clive (1999). *Astronomy in Prehistoric Britain and Ireland*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Some background books on astronomy:

Evans, James (1998). *The History and Practice of Ancient Astronomy*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Largely about ancient Greek astronomy from about 700 BCE).

Heath, Robin (1999 & 2006). *Sun, Moon and Earth*. Glastonbury: Wooden Books.

Hoskin, Michael (ed.) (1999). *The Cambridge Concise History of Astronomy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

North, John (1994). *The Fontana History of Astronomy and Cosmology*. London: Fontana Press.

Walker, C. (ed) (1996). *Astronomy Before the Telescope*. London: British Museum Press.

Books on Stonehenge:

(You could form a small library of books on this one site alone!)

Burl, Aubrey (2007). *A Brief History of Stonehenge*. London: Robinson.

Chippindale, Christopher (2004). *Stonehenge Complete*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Hawkins, Gerald S. (1966). *Stonehenge Decoded*. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins.

Heath, Robin (1993). *A Key to Stonehenge*. Cardigan, Wales: Bluestone Press.

Heath, Robin (2000). *Stonehenge*. Powys, Wales: Wooden Books.

History of Archaeoastronomy:

Lockyer, Norman (1906). *Stonehenge and other British Stone Monuments Astronomically Considered*. London: Macmillan. (reprinted by Kessinger Publishing).

Lockyer, Norman. *Dawn of Astronomy*. (reprinted by Kessinger Publishing)

Michell, John (2001). *A Little History of Astro-Archaeology*. New York: Thames and Hudson. (an excellent introduction)

Newham, C.A. (1967). *The Astronomical Significance of Stonehenge*. Moon Publications.

Thom, Alexander (1967). *Megalithic Sites in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Professor Thom's demanding books are now rare editions, but anyone seriously interested in archaeoastronomy soon wants to possess them!)

Thom, Alexander (1971). *Megalithic Lunar Observatories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thom, A. and Thom, A.S. (1978). *Megalithic Remains in Britain and Brittany*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ancient Seafaring and Exploration:

(Evidence for ancient seafaring and navigation supports the idea that people in prehistory had a close knowledge of the skies).

Cunliffe, Barry (2001). *The Extraordinary Voyage of Pytheas the Greek*. New York: Walker and Company.

Cunliffe, Barry (2001). *Facing the Ocean. The Atlantic and its Peoples*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heyerdahl, Thor (1950). *The Kon-Tiki Expedition*. London: Allen & Unwin. (Gripping real-life adventure story – followed by others equally exciting)

Heyerdahl, Thor (1978). *Early Man and the Ocean. The beginning of navigation and seaborne civilisations*. London: Allen and Unwin. (a general and academic approach to the subject).

Lewis, David (1972). *We The Navigators. The Ancient Art of Landfinding in the Pacific*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.

Zapp, Ivar and Erikson, George (1998). *Atlantis in America. Navigators of the Ancient World*. Adventures Unlimited Press: Illinois, USA.

Websites:

(just a few to get started)

The Megalithic Portal – world-wide ancient site database. Thousands of photographs. Grid references and co-ordinates of sites given. Forum for exchange of ideas.

www.megalithic.co.uk

The Modern Antiquarian – massive resource for news, information and images of ancient sites across Europe. Forums and blogs.

www.themodernantiquarian.com

Megalithic Studies mid-Wales

(impressive site with descriptions of selected places around the world with their astronomical alignments, as well as useful explanatory pages on astronomical concepts)

www.megalithicsites.co.uk

Royal Commission websites:

- **on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland**

www.rcahms.gov.uk/

- **on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales**

www.rcahmw.gov.uk/

- **on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of England**

(merged with English Heritage 1999)

www.buildingconservation.com