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## Foreword

### INSAP IV in Oxford: A Summary

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**Rolf Sinclair**

*...the three lone weirs, the youthful Thames...  
The tender purple spray on copse and briers!  
And that sweet city with her dreaming spires,  
She needs not June for beauty's heightening,  
Lovely all times she lies, lovely to-night!*

[Matthew Arnold, 'Thyrsis' (1866)]

A good part of the pleasure of the INSAP conferences has been in the locations. Castelgandolfo (1994), Malta (1999), Palermo (2001), and now the 'dreaming spires of Oxford' in 2003 are the locales that have been as interesting as the meetings themselves.

The theme of these meetings continues to be of broad interest. Simply stated, it is the effect on humanity of the spectacle of the sky by night and by day. Although this spectacle is always with us wherever we go, we often tend to take it and its effects for granted. Bringing it out explicitly has been particularly productive.

The fourth conference continued the same pattern of the earlier meetings, and brought new faces and new topics. Presentations were divided between talks and posters, and both media worked well. The presentations were full of interesting surprises. I myself found the overall quality and interest of the presentations to be among the highest of any meeting I have attended.

There were more than 80 attendees who came for the entire INSAP IV. About half of them came from North America and a third from the UK. Most of the rest came from Europe, with one from Israel and two from Australia. Perhaps the only regret is that we have so few who come from outside the North Atlantic Community. About half the attendees were coming to an INSAP for the first time, bringing new ideas to enrich the interdisciplinary mix.

The nature of the presentations at the INSAP meetings continues to shift slowly. This latest meeting now had half the presentations dealing with art and art history, and included the works of several contemporary

artists. This aspect of the meetings has been slowly increasing. A quarter dealt with mythology and folklore. The remainder were scattered through a broad range of human activity, from the lanternslides of popular talks in the nineteenth century to current cosmology.

The papers collected in this volume merit a careful reading, to appreciate how varied are the cultural effects of astronomical phenomena. They show the interdisciplinary range of these effects, and yet how well the individual disciplines can handle their parts of them.

The Internet continues to be the channel through which word of INSAP gets around to reach such a diverse group of interested people. That was complemented by the careful search by the Local Committee for invited speakers from the South of England to give the featured talks.

A high point of the meeting was a rare chance to visit Stonehenge at dawn and be able to wander around the stones. We are particularly grateful to Clive Ruggles for his masterful guidance, and for Mike Pitt for taking us on to the Avebury circle. That was a day well spent among evidence of the cultural complexity of early Britain.

The day before, the meeting marked the memory of Gerald Hawkins in a brief commemoration. Dr Hawkins was to have been the keynote speaker of the conference, to acknowledge his work at Stonehenge as the first to recognize the wealth of astronomical features in that unique construction. Sadly, he died unexpectedly, shortly before the meeting.

A special exhibition of original works of contemporary artists from America, Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, entitled *The Sublime Metaphor*, was mounted in the Oxford University Museum as part of the conference. The exhibition was organized by Jan White, Daniel Oberti, Marea Atkinson, and Valerie Shrimplin. Other tours and receptions took us to the Oxford Museum of the History of Science and to Blackwell's Bookshop, and made us familiar with the streets and byways of the city.

Magdalen College was an ideal setting for the meeting. Sitting between town and countryside, it allowed early morning walks by the Cherwell and through the parks as well as evening strolls into Oxford for dinner. I am sure that all of us enjoyed our time there and left with regret.

Such a fine meeting did not just happen. We are all indebted to the Local Committee consisting of Valerie Shrimplin, Nick Campion, and Peter Hingley for their work over several years that made the meeting possible. Valerie is to be particularly thanked for her frequent trips to Oxford to make the local arrangements, and for repeatedly taking care of crises in real time. Nick has made possible this volume you are now

reading. The staff of Magdalen College made our stay there a happy one. We are particularly grateful to the staff of the Porter's Lodge for their help at all hours of the day and night, and to Bill Lees for solving all our audio/visual problems with speed and aplomb. The Royal Astronomical Society helped the conference with a grant that supported four student attendees.

The meeting ended with the best of news, the announcement by Paul Knappenberger that INSAP V will be held at the Adler Planetarium in Chicago June 26-July 2, 2005. This will take us for the first time to a major city, one that we will all enjoy. The Adler is in one of the most beautiful urban settings in the US, at the end of a peninsula into Lake Michigan with the Chicago skyline as a backdrop. We can expect the fifth in this series of meetings to be as rewarding as the first four.

See you in the 'Windy City'!