

COMMISSION 41 WORKING GROUP on ASTRONOMY AND WORLD HERITAGE

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PROCEEDINGS BUSINESS SESSIONS August 2009

What follows is a short report on the Business Meeting of the Astronomy and World Heritage Working Group held on Thursday August 6, 2009. This was the first formal Business

Meeting of the Working Group since its formation following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the IAU and UNESCO on Astronomy and World Heritage in October 2008.

A fuller account of the activities of the Working Group may be found in the “Astronomy and World Heritage” by Clive Ruggles that appears in Chapter I of these Transactions.

1. Officers and Members

The chair Clive Ruggles, the vice-chair Gudrun Wolfschmidt and the secretary Tom Hockey were confirmed in office. The existing membership was confirmed, which includes some non-IAU members. This is necessary in a WG whose remit is inherently cross-disciplinary. It was agreed to invite all Thematic Study authors to join the WG, including those who are not IAU members. The meeting noted that there is a good balance with regard to gender and to geographical distribution.

The following were confirmed as new WG members: Dieter Engels (Germany), Tomoko Fujiwara (Japan), Brian Mason (USA), Nha Il-Seong (Korea), Jos Osrio (Portugal), Malcolm Smith (Chile), and Yang Hong-Jin (Korea).

2. Terms of Reference

The WG's Terms of Reference were confirmed, as follows:

1. To work on behalf of the IAU to help ensure that cultural properties and artefacts significant in the development of astronomy, together with the intangible heritage of astronomy, are duly studied, protected and maintained, both for the greater benefit of humankind and to the potential benefit of future historical research.

(a) To fulfil, on behalf of the IAU, its commitments under its Memorandum of Understanding with UNESCO to promote Astronomy and World Heritage and to explore and implement UNESCO's Astronomy and World Heritage Initiative.

(b) To liaise with other international and national bodies concerned with astronomical history and heritage, in so far as their interests and activities impinge on these aims, to help achieve these aims.

2. To work, in conjunction with IAU C41 (History of Astronomy), IAU C46 (Education) and other Commissions and Working Groups within the IAU as appropriate, to enhance public interest, understanding, and support in the field of astronomical heritage.

Notes

(a) The range of properties and objects in question includes ancient sites and monuments with demonstrable links to the sky (such as Stonehenge), instruments of all ages, archives, and historical observatories.

(b) This initiative aims to ensure the recognition, promotion and preservation of achievements in science through the nomination to the World Heritage List of properties whose outstanding significance to humankind derives in significant part from their connection with astronomy.

3. Progress to Date

The main work item for the WG so far has been the Thematic Study on the Heritage Sites of Astronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the context of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, which is being prepared in collaboration with ICOMOS, the Advisory Body to UNESCO that assesses WHL applications relating to cultural heritage. This will be edited by Clive Ruggles together with Michel Cotte of ICOMOS. The editors have completed, in draft form, an overview that will constitute the opening chapter. The 14 themes for the Thematic Study have been defined, namely Earlier Prehistory; Pre-Columbian and indigenous America; Later Prehistoric Europe; Later prehistoric and indigenous Africa, Asia, Australasia and Oceania; Ancient and medieval Far East; India; Mesopotamia and the Middle East; Ancient Egypt; The Classical World; Arabic and Islamic Astronomy; Medieval astronomy in Europe; Astronomy from the Renaissance to the mid-twentieth century; Contemporary astronomy and astrophysics; and Space astronomy. The authors have identified and nine draft chapters have been received. The

intention is to complete the Thematic Study by January 2010. The three sessions following the Business Meeting were devoted to a detailed discussion of the Thematic Study.

A second key activity is to create a public database of properties with a relationship to astronomy that will serve as a forum for information gathering and exchange. The database will be produced by transferring and then expanding UNESCO's Astronomy and World Heritage "Timeframe", which is already available on the WHC website, but which is restricted to sites that are already on the World Heritage List.

It was noted that the September 2009 issue of UNESCO's quarterly magazine *World Heritage Review* will be devoted to astronomical and science heritage, with the leading article written by Clive Ruggles.

The Working Group has developed strong links with the Starlight Initiative and was represented at its meeting in Fuerteventura in March 2009. A significant outcome of this meeting was the establishment of a "Dark Skies Advisory Group" whose remit is to support IUCN activities relating to dark skies (IUCN being the Advisory Body to UNESCO that assesses WHL applications relating to natural heritage). The WG is represented on this Advisory Group by its Chair.

4. Future meetings

It was noted that a number of meetings will take place during 2009 as part of the cycle of activities planned by the UNESCO-IAU Astronomy and World Heritage Initiative within the framework of the IYA Global Cornerstone Project on Astronomy and World Heritage. In particular, immediately following the GA there is an international conference dedicated to the theme of "Astronomy and World Heritage: Across Time and Continents" to be held at Kazan in the Russian Federation. All of these meetings will provide an opportunity for WG members to obtain further input for and feedback on the Thematic Study and the WG's other activities.

Clive Ruggles

Chair of the Working Group