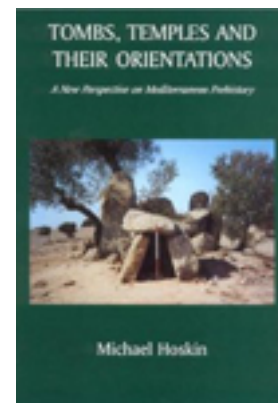


## **Tombs, Temples and their Orientations: A New Perspective on Mediterranean Prehistory**

*by Michael Hoskin*

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This remarkable study sums up a decade of intensive and highly original fieldwork in the central and western Mediterranean, which uncovered and interpreted scores of hitherto unrecognised customs of orientation. After an introductory discussion of his general aims and fieldwork methodology, Hoskin devotes each chapter to evidence from a particular region: the book covers the Iberian peninsula, Balearic islands, southern France, Corsica and Sardinia, Sicily and Pantelleria, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, and Malta and Gozo. Hoskin concludes that in most of these regions the monuments faced sunrise, or more generally the sun when it was rising or climbing in the sky. Along the Mediterranean coast of France, however, there is a reverse sunset custom; in North Africa tombs faced downhill and in a Minoan cemetery on Crete all the tombs faced moonrise and look towards a mountain on whose peak was a sanctuary probably sacred to a lunar god.

### **Reviews**

“The book’s first chapter is a general introduction to the field of archaeoastronomy and describes as well how the author became interested in orientation studies in Mediterranean Europe. His second chapter is invaluable because it is targeted toward an audience unfamiliar with archaeoastronomical research. It contains a readable and concise explanation of the rigorous methodology now employed by archaeoastronomers as well as an effective introduction to the observable cycles of the sun, moon, planets and stars as they would have been seen by ancient people.

“Rather than merely being a list of what orientations and monuments he measured over the past twenty years, this book is often a personal reflection of the joys and tribulations of attempting this kind of research ...

“This book is a valuable addition to archaeoastronomical research and critical for the growth of the field in the Mediterranean. It is an impressive account of a career spent searching for sites, taking careful measurements, and then publishing the results in an easy-to-understand format that allows the data to be used by specialists and non-specialists alike. The book is accessible to those who are interested in the archaeology of a particular area or those just interested in archaeoastronomy in general. I would also recommend the book for archaeologists who have never had an interest in archaeoastronomy or who consider the field to be peripheral to important archaeological research. This book might just change your mind.”

Marie Goodwin, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (June 2002)

“Meaning and symbolism are increasingly being sought in the prehistoric record. However, data which support alternative hypotheses are too frequently elusive. It is, therefore, most welcome to see the clear statistical foundations on which interpretations can be based. The comprehensive work by Hoskin and colleagues, recording the orientations of tombs and temples of the Maltese islands, the Balearics, Iberia, France, Corsica and Sardinia, forms an important foundation for the study of the cultural identity of these communities. Hoskin favours a solar explanation for the predominantly south and eastern orientation of most monuments, an approach which concurs with current views of the impact of different life cycles on the built environment. However, the good fieldwork clearly expressed in orientation diagrams and histograms also permits alternative and multiple explanations. Each axis of orientation has two potential directions. One can question which had primacy. It is even possible that different members of the community stressed one or both. Furthermore, local, non-celestial explanations, such as ancestral topography, may have had equal or alternative explanatory value. Whatever the interpretation, these studies of Hoskin have formed an invaluable basis for further work. Systematic studies of this type need to be applied to the full repertoire of the built environment, seeking to incorporate the non-monumental, however difficult in these intensively exploited terrains.”

Simon Stoddart, *Antiquity* (2001)