

After a sustained effort, Prešov observers reached an exceptional milestone on 4 October 1984 when the planetarium building was opened. The beginning of its operation offered professionals much wider opportunities for popularization, but also for education of children, youth and the general public. It has been an integral part of the Observatory for nearly 40 years.

The book *Storočia astronómie v Prešove* by Kolivošková shows how many sources the author had to deal with in order to create such a cross-section of the history of astronomy in Prešov. The literature and sources point to the original texts from the founder of this scientific discipline in Prešov, Duchoň, through articles by the Directors of the Observatory, the material in the State District Archive in Prešov and in the archive of the Observatory itself. The overall impression from the book is positive. The chapters are sequential in time, as outlined in the Contents, and it is clear that the author cared about finding a balance between the text and the supporting photographs.

I think this book has something for everyone, not only people of the city Prešov but those with an interest in the history of this part of Slovakia (400km east of the capital, Bratislava). In this book, the author tried to systematize, summarize and capture as accurately as possible the important milestones in the history of astronomy in this region, and it is up to a reader to assess whether the author succeeded.

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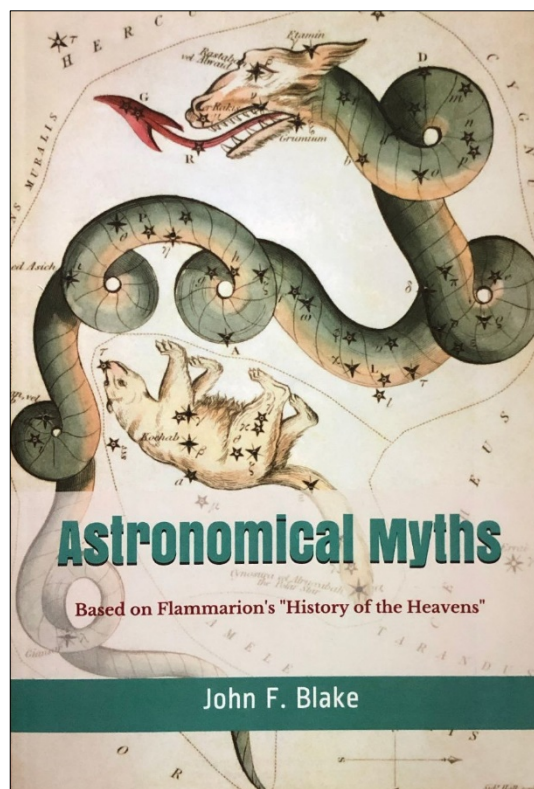
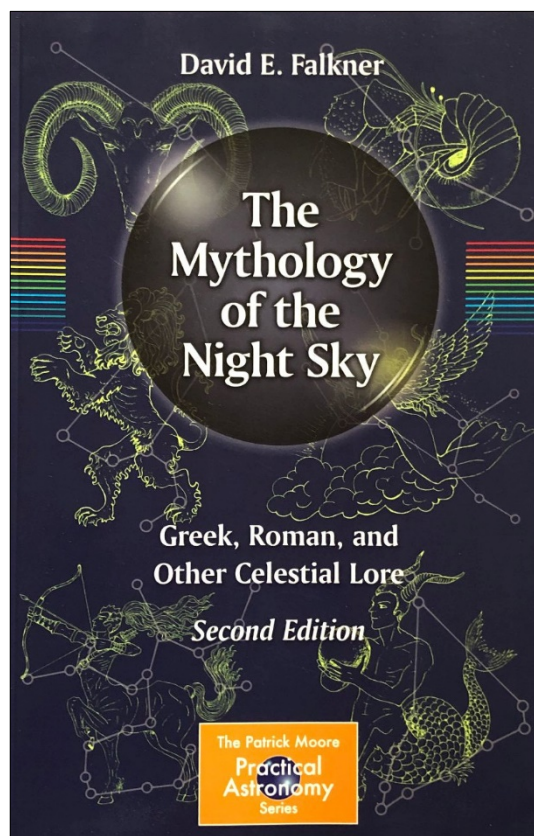
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***The Mythology of the Night Sky: Greek, Roman and Other Celestial Lore. Second Edition*, by David E. Falkner. (Cham, Springer, 2020). Pp. xvi + 331. ISBN 978-3-030-47693-9 (softcover), 155 × 235 mm, US \$29.99.**

***Astronomical Myths: Based on Flammarion's "History of the Heavens"*, by John F. Blake. (Triamazikamno Editions, 2020). Pp. 212. ISBN 979-8-612-70088-3 (softcover), 153 × 230 mm, \$29.75.**

These two books on astronomical mythology can most profitably be read together. David Falkner is president of the Minnesota Astronomical Society, while John Blake is long deceased. The edition of the 1877 book by Blake (1839–1906) reviewed here was pri-

vately published in 2020 with an attractive colour cover depicting the constellation Draco.



Even though it does not include any of the original illustrations, this is a fine new publication of the English-language version of

Camille Flammarion's 1872 book *Histoire des cieux*; it was modified by Blake, who abandoned the original conversational-style French text.

The key factor linking both books is the audience for which they were written: the public, and amateur astronomers. Thus, neither can (or should be) measured against a scholarly work. While the Blake book is valuable for the perspective it offers on the nineteenth-century approach to astronomical mythology, one must expect the recent Falkner book (a second edition of his 2011 effort) to be fully up-to-date and free of any egregious errors. Sadly, that is not the case.

My reading of the Falkner title suddenly halted at the line "... Ptolemy must have travelled very near the equator at some point." (page 35). No reference is given for this astonishing assertion, which is not surprising as it has no known factual basis. Falkner is led to this 'pretty evident' claim because Ptolemy included "... Eridanus as well as the constellations of the ship Argo in his list of 48 constellations." (page 35). Ptolemy certainly worked in Alexandria, but even if he had visited Upper (southern) Egypt, that would still be 22° north of the equator. Actually, Ptolemy relied on the Roman expeditions of Flaccus and Maternus to Ethiopia for information from the far south, and likely other sources as well.

Quite troubling is the Falkner book Bibliography: nearly half its entries refer to a Wikipedia page, and most of the remaining entries are to Internet sites. Even high school students are warned against using Wikipedia as a reference in an essay! Furthermore, the Blake book is not referenced. None of the entries of genuine sources is in alphabetical order by author: it appears Springer violated its own rules for creating a bibliography.

Considering their importance in astronomical lore, allotting the Pleiades only three paragraphs to explain its associated mythological lore seems scant. By contrast, the Blake book devotes an entire 13-page chapter to the cluster. While the strength of the Falkner book is that you can quickly find the name of a particular star, asteroid, or planetary moon and read its associated astronomical and mythological information, the Blake book provides a narrative about myths that ranges widely from eclipses and comets to astrology, cosmography and cosmology. Both books do well on the origin of the constellations.

Falkner's book contains a map of each constellation, with star names and NGC

objects listed. They derive from Starry Night Education, and appear to be screen captures. The font size of the designated deep sky objects is so small (less than 6pt) in many cases as to require a magnifying glass, and the type itself is a bit fuzzy. The outline of the constellations is fine, with the star names in red, but lacking precise coordinates, so their value for actually pointing a telescope at any of the deep sky objects is zero.

Falkner devotes a third of a page to the 'mystery' of the eclipsing variable star Epsilon Aurigae. He notes that astronomers observed the eclipse "... that started in 2009 and ran until early 2011," with a "... host of orbiting observatories." (page 32). He concludes this discussion by stating "... there is no doubt that the mystery of Epsilon Aurigae will be solved during this cycle." Clearly, this passage was in the first edition of the book, but was not updated to reflect the study of this star during the intervening nine years that largely solved the mystery! This is a true disservice to the reader. That problem page 32 also has a typo: stiking instead of striking.

While the addition of mythological tales from cultures other than the Greco-Roman world is welcome in this new edition, its flaws prevent it from being the really excellent book it had the potential to be.

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***The Birth of Modern Astronomy*, by Harm J. Habing (Cham, Springer, 2019). Pp. xlii + 565. ISBN 978-3-319-99081-1 (hardback), 156 × 234 mm, €166.39.**

In the years between 1945 and 2015, astronomy was transformed in terms, among other things, of the discipline's content, the instruments astronomers used, and the relationship between astronomy and national governments. What, however, is the best approach to writing the history of modern astronomy? How much weight should an author give to intellectual factors compared to, say, economic and social considerations? In *The Birth of Modern Astronomy*, Harm J. Habing, a well-known Dutch astronomer at the University of Leiden, centres his account almost entirely on the shifting content of astronomical ideas and theories, together with the role played therein by instruments, to make sense of the remaking of astronomy in the post-World War II era. As he tells it, this story has a triumphant conclusion because "Mankind now knows its full history" (page