

EDITORIAL

☞ ‘The trouble with archaeology’ remarked (Lord) Rupert Redesdale at a recent gathering of British academics (at the British Academy) ‘is that it has no product’. Without a product, it is difficult to assign the activity a social value or an effective role in the market place, things that matter today. Well, *of course* archaeology has a product, and it has moreover, an enormous ‘client base’. New knowledge about the past allows you to create a historic building, enhance a landscape, respect the environment, understand your origins, enjoy the culture of other countries and come to terms with mortality. Not a bad list. Our clients also include a limitless number of the unborn, whose votes and money are, admittedly, hard to collect. On his recent retirement the great Tam Dalyell, long-term friend of archaeology (see *Antiquity* 76: 1050-4), pointed out that what was different about the new House of Commons was its large proportion of professional politicians who had never done anything else. The implication was that to make sensible decisions about life, you must have lived it, and he recommended a minimum 5 years of real work before telling other people how to manage. Perhaps archaeology could help here. I would think that a few years of digging and listening, through deep time, to the voices of the people without history is an admirable preparation for government.

The real problem is not that we have no product, but that we have no straightforward way of measuring it. Ranking the performance of archaeological academics has something of the difficulty of ranking furnished burials – and one or two of the same criteria may apply. So, to designate the high esteem of a princely grave, we look for large numbers of objects (=many articles published), artefacts of intricate manufacture (=fond of complex theoretical argument) and imported from far away (=given to long absences abroad). Archaeological research in Britain is now hosted by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and, being a research council, it belongs in the Office of Science and Technology. Here we come face-to-face with a range of managerial prescriptions that scientists have learnt to love, such as the citation index. This scores each published article by the number of times it is cited: the more citations, the more ‘important’ the article. But arts researchers recognise in themselves a love of irony and critique that can mean that the most cited articles are those that are easiest to disdain. So the citations index might measure high levels of contention rather than esteem.

Next step: to rank the journals so that an article in one journal scores more than an article in another. But there is a caveat in the case of archaeology. There are in our subject no global advances: the hydrogen atom might be the same from China to Peru, but the past isn’t, and that’s the point. We may once have thought that one interpretation of the past was (theoretically) ‘better’ than another – but theory itself has put paid to that. Discovering things (i.e. fieldwork) does have a permanent value (if done carefully) because the results will still be usable in a hundred years time (as we have repeatedly found). But it is hard to rank one discovery above another, because its significance for making sense of the past can lie a long way in the future.

It doesn’t stop us trying of course. *Antiquity* is determined to serve the community of archaeological researchers in every way, whatever they are asked to do. On the one hand, we shall aim to be registered with the Humanities, Social Sciences, Anthropological and all

the other citation indices. We shall continue to circulate our press releases. Thanks to our referees, outstandingly generous with their time and honest in their opinions, we shall work to make peer reviewing seek out excellence and lasting value. All of this should help to make our authors' work better known and more widely read. On the other hand, we shall continue to appreciate that archaeology is rooted in a local soil, and that every past in every part of the world has contributed to the understanding of human life on earth and so deserves to be better known. This means that in addition to serving the needs of current selectivity, we shall invest in newer, less professionalised archaeologies that will come to excellence in 10 years' time. We shall be led by curiosity, as well as being driven by competition.

Focus on Islam

Our new series has excited interest and continues in this issue with new work on the Desert Castles and a comprehensive study of the mosque at Jerash. There is no doubt that the archaeological research in this area deserves promotion, but the balance of emphasis is hard to strike. Joan Oates would like to see more space given to indigenous researchers – and this we would certainly wish to do. Michael Gibbons feels that Andrew Petersen (*Antiquity* 78: 102) was too ready to line up with Edward Said's verdict on Western orientalism. Influential generalisations are blunt instruments by their nature. Not every Westerner is irredeemably blind to everything but a reprehensible agenda. Many of us will know that there are, and have been, a great many archaeologists who have immersed themselves selflessly in the service of other cultures, and seek nothing more than seeing them better known and more admired.


Energetic and fun

Nine hundred delegates gathered at York in January to debate the latest and greatest in Historical Archaeology, a topic covering the material culture of the last three centuries – or maybe more. In theory, 'historical' can mean any archaeology blessed (or cursed) with written documents, so including medieval, early medieval, classical, and the archaeologies of early Egypt and Mesopotamia. For some this is a methodological project: how to reconcile and contrast material and written evidence. For others it is a political venture, reconstructing post-colonial thinking or liberating the people without history. All this was evident in a formidable programme (sadly the African session did not materialise) that included such intriguing topics as: *They died with their boots on – or did they? Sheffield in its days of steel*, *Eighteenth century Spanish corsairs*, *Underwater survey of The Ark Royal* (sunk off Gibraltar in WW2), *'Some nice, small Civil War artefacts'*, *Old and Freakish monuments in nineteenth and twentieth century New Jersey*, *Dining at the English Country House c. 1750-1850* and *Archaeology as Civil Engagement*.

Possibly not even the organisers would expect dominant themes to emerge from 492 papers, but some did. Not only modern in their interests but modern in their practice, historical archaeologists are down to earth and extremely busy. An unusually large proportion of the delegates were field professionals from firms and companies practising in countries where historic sites and buildings are meat and drink; in the USA and Australia, particularly, the recent past continues to get a very fair hearing through the Cultural Resource Management system. Many of the papers were naturally concerned with presenting recent

results – archaeological discovery for its own sake. But theorising was not absent and nor was field experiment; and quite right too. As has long been known, both theory and method have a high potential for testing in well-documented periods. We look forward to publishing more successes from an area of archaeology that is full of energy and fun. Among the items included in the fund-raising ‘silent auction’ were a green 10-Pocket vest, a basket of Tecnu Anti-Poison Ivy Products, and a water bomb made by the late Jim Deetz out of a menu for lobbing at colleagues during the legendary 1975 meeting at Charleston which produced *Historical Archaeology and the Importance of Material Things*.



 Our page three pot is the terracotta head from Las Balsas, Mexico, which has been claimed as both Mesoamerican and Phoenician (‘an outlandish, grotesque deity, namely the god Bes’). The object has naturally enjoyed a brief notoriety as evidence for early contact between the Old World and the New, but in 1997 thermoluminescent dating showed its earliest date of manufacture to be the mid-nineteenth century. The head (height 83mm) is discussed, along with other recently ‘manufactured’ antiquities, by Romeo Hristov and Santiago Genovés in the current Project Gallery (www.antiquity.ac.uk/projgall/hristov).

Seventy years ago

In his editorial for June 1935, O.G.S. Crawford took his contributors to task for the shoddy preparation of their texts, maps and photographs: ‘It is, for example, no part of the editorial duty either to find, or to make illustrations, though because he wants the article, the Editor often does both. Maps, too, should be drawn with due regard to the size of a page in the journal for which they are intended, and for the amount of reduction they will have to stand. Articles should begin at the beginning of the subject treated and not in the middle,

and should end at the end. They should also be written in plain, straightforward English, with as little technical jargon as possible'. Some of our authors – though not many, I'm glad to say – cling to these old traditions.

In 1935 articles appeared on 'The evolution of the domestic horse', 'Wagons and their ancestors' and 'Pyramids and their purpose', while Gordon Childe's *New Light on the Most Ancient East* appeared in the Review section. In the summer to come, Dr Wheeler's excavations at Maiden Castle were expected to be the centre of attraction. These and other gems from the past 78 years of archaeology are now available on line to those holding *Antiquity's* advantageously priced Premium subscription, or for non-subscribers, individual articles may be purchased and downloaded. Find *Antiquity's* new range of products at www.antiquity.ac.uk



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Moments musicaux

Congratulations to Juzhong Zhang, Xinghua Xiao and Yun Kuen Lee who have been awarded the *Antiquity* Prize for their article on the early development of music as deduced from the Neolithic bone flutes excavated at Jiahu (*Antiquity* 78: 769-78). It is a pleasure to salute these archaeologists of China. And congratulations too to the winner of the Cullen Prize for younger researchers, who was Nicole Boivin for 'Rock art and rock music' (*Antiquity* 78: 38-53), her account of Neolithic petroglyphs in south India. These petroglyphs of cattle and people were etched into rocks that rang when you hit them. It all goes to show that our readers love a good tune and a good title.

Martin Carver
York, 1 June 2005