

EDITORIAL

☞ Where is archaeology going? Can *Antiquity* answer this question? Should it try to? We are privileged to be sent much of the best new research – or that part of it ready to be summarised into short statements. What does it tell us about the direction in which archaeological minds are moving? The submissions are not random: there is a scholarly *Zeitgeist* which moves among them and could perhaps be detected by an astute *geistbuster*. Trying to place a finger on the future is a pleasant exercise that could prove useful, even if wrong.

Criticisms of our content heard at conferences take a random form: ‘*too much Palaeolithic*’, ‘*all that Polynesia*’, ‘*not many papers relevant to me*’ or ‘*bewildering variety*’. My first reaction is always one of surprise that so few readers like to read outside their field. But a second imperative is to take stock: do we do justice to the whole world and all the loom of time? As a check and guide to the research we published in 2006, readers may care to take advantage of the new ‘Time and Topics’ table printed at the head of the index (p. 1038). This certainly presents a feast, but can anyone hope to identify a significant trend from its rich and varied menu? A few subjects quickly suggest themselves for expansive chat: the enduring subtext provided by agriculture; the language of burial; the recurrence of symbols. Bulls have a walk-on ritual role in Europe over ten millennia, featuring on stelae in Iberia, as deposits in Iron Age France and under the Sutton Hoo axe-hammer. Iron Age people are burying their dead as mummies in furnished chambers under pyramids in Mongolia. But presumably we do not suspect an invasion by Rameses II. Do chariot burials mean nomads? New work is mapping horses and chariots over northern Asia, a continent coming increasingly under the spotlight as an originator of movement both east and west. Sea travel is almost ubiquitous, from the time that there was a sea; in this year alone researchers describe prehistoric journeys in the Red Sea, the China Sea, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and the North Sea beginning in 8000 and perhaps originating in the earliest hominin breakout. Human mobility is becoming earlier and more continuous, so many additional scintillations of light, spotted in each of the seven seas. This year we even published our first paper about the archaeological heritage on the moon. And three key methods are helping to create this global framework: satellite survey, isotope signatures (as signals of place of origin) and radiocarbon dating. And in case you are thinking, well, the last of these at least is old hat, look at the first article of this issue, which will send shivers of anxiety through many existing absolute dates. The research team suggest that no date before 26 000 BP and few before 12 400 BP are currently safe, and that new mutually supporting networks must be built up.

One could advance the tentative opinion that the dream of a world prehistory is coming ever closer to reality – raising the suspicion that the world always was a global village. If so, it should be possible to build a powerful explanatory discourse about humans, independent of their modern preoccupations. There are still some conceptual inhibitions to such a discourse, the divisions of time and space perhaps prominent among them. My ten ‘periods’ were creations of convenience, based on datability, designed to help readers escape from their native narratives. A neutral terminology of time could help to link prehistoric fragments that we can now begin to suspect were never totally isolated from each other. As for space, continents rather than countries might provide the neutral scientific ground. Given these, we can anticipate the creation of universal frameworks by the boldest among us.

📖 Global overviews are the business of global conferences. Before the Southampton revolution of 1986 which gave birth to the World Archaeological Congress, the world's archaeological *Mecca* was the congress of the *International Union for Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences*, otherwise *Union Internationale des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protolithiques*. In the new era this latter gathering was thought too prescriptive and pedagogic, too western and too scientific to satisfy post-colonial needs, and many of us concluded that its day was done. However the Union has risen phoenix-like with renewed strength at Lisbon where from 4-9th September 2006, over 2500 authors contributed *c.* 1500 papers presented in 101 sessions under the organisation of the Polytechnic Institute of Tomar. The published proceedings of this 15th Congress are expected to run to 45 volumes.

Was there a particular emphasis in subject area? Perhaps a little towards the earlier (and longer) periods of prehistory: 25 per cent of the papers dealt with Palaeolithic societies, and an extra 5 per cent were related to human evolution and environmental adaptations. Sessions on the origins and spread of hominins, on the origins of modern humans in Europe and on the middle/upper Palaeolithic transition attracted the largest number of contributions. The papers on post-Palaeolithic contexts were 22 per cent of the total, with those focusing on the early farmers and metallurgists corresponding to 12.5 per cent. Among these, the largest session was focused on prehistoric burial mounds across the world. The remaining sessions crossed these chronological boundaries, with regional studies (14 per cent), prehistoric art (12 per cent) and technical studies (mostly lithics) at 10 per cent.

How does IUPPS or UISPP intend to relate to the archaeological community as a whole? Secretary General Luiz Oosterbeek made this nice and clear: '*The Congress also served for a relevant renewal of the Union*' he said, and it '*staged the participation of many other international organisations (such as WAC, IFRAO, INQUA or HERITY*) stressing the value of UISPP as the common ground representative of prehistoric and protohistoric research*'. He was pleased to point out that more than 50 per cent of the sessions were organised by younger scholars, and they attracted the support of 150 volunteers (with the help of the European Forum of Heritage Organisations). The Permanent Council was re-established with 40 new members and the Executive Committee with 5 new members, together with new Scientific Commissions. The Union decided to hold its next world congress in Brazil in 2011. It elected Pe. Ignácio Schmitz as new President, Luiz Oosterbeek as Secretary General and Rossano Lopes Bastos as Congress secretary. Further information will be available at www.uispp.ipt.pt.

The resurgence of UISPP will be good news for the world's archaeological researchers. Could the Union perhaps think up a slightly more manageable set of initials for those of us who even have trouble remembering our own? Perhaps the *Global Union of Prehistorians* or GUP (UGP)?

📖 Of some relevance to the future of prehistory, an advertisement for a *Chair of Classical Archaeology* at the University of Edinburgh appeared in the *Guardian* for 27 August 2006. '*You should be a scholar of the highest international distinction*', it advised, '*with a proven track record in research and teaching in one or more of the areas of the archaeology of the Greek or Roman worlds, from the Greek Bronze Age to late Antiquity*'. It then announced, surprisingly:

* *World Archaeological Congress, International Federation of Rock Art Organizations, International Union for Quaternary Research. HERITY is HERitage quality, a heritage organisation founded in 2002 and scheduled to have its first international congress in Rome 5-9 December 2006.*

'This is a newly established Chair, but if you have an appropriate research specialism, it may be possible to assume the existing Abercromby Chair of Archaeology'.

The 'appropriate specialism' is presumably one of those required by the founder of the Chair, John Abercromby, 5th Baron Abercromby of Aboukir and Tullibody, which we helpfully reprinted on the appointment of the present incumbent in 1977 (*Antiquity* 51: 3-4). It might be useful to pick out a few of these for the benefit of applicants (and the University): 'I limit the subject for which the proposed Chair is to be founded' said Abercromby, 'to that department of the science of Archaeology that treats of the antiquities and civilisation of the Countries of Europe and the Near East from the earliest times to the period at which the written history of each country may be said to begin'. The newly appointed professor 'shall apply himself to the investigation and solution of some of the many problems and difficulties that encompass the study of Archaeology' and, furthermore, 'It is my desire that he shall impart his acquired knowledge not only to his classes, but to a wider audience through the medium of the Press and otherwise'. He was also expected to be proficient in French and German with a working knowledge of Italian.

Quite right too. The first two Abercromby professors were Gordon Childe and Stuart Piggott, who conformed to the specification in all particulars, breaking new ground and writing popular books. These were hard acts to follow.

The *Guardian* advert says that the glorious assumption of the Abercromby title could happen 'on the retrieval of the present incumbent' [sic] by which I hope is meant his honourable retirement. It is possible that the present incumbent, Professor Dennis Harding, has been already tried enough by this astonishing decision of the University of Edinburgh, which appears to have been taken without any consultation with the archaeological community. In his letter to the Principal, Dennis remarks 'I am aware that the Abercromby bequest no longer covers the salary of the Chair, which is therefore funded from University resources. If Edinburgh University no longer wishes to sustain Old World Archaeology, or the Abercromby Chair, that is of course for the University to decide. To proceed as currently appears to be the intention, however, seems to me to be an abuse of Lord Abercromby's intentions and memory' (11 September 2006). This is the nub of the matter. Does Edinburgh wish to continue with the study of archaeology? If so, how did it forget that much of human life took place before the Greek Bronze Age, and continued after Constantine? There have been nearly 50 years of discussions about what constitutes a degree in archaeology, most recently by the Subject Committee for Archaeology, and it would be a shame to consign all this hard thinking to oblivion.

The Abercromby Chair at Edinburgh was established in 1927, in the same year that the only other Chair of Archaeology then in Britain, the Disney at Cambridge, was redefined,



Dennis Harding, present holder of the Abercromby Chair of Archaeology at Edinburgh, with his predecessor Stuart Piggott.

and the present journal was founded. Glyn Daniel remarked in 1959 that ‘*The year 1927 may therefore fittingly be remembered as a landmark in the history of the study of non-classical antiquity in our universities*’ (*Antiquity* 33: 2). The health and prospects of our coeval companion is thus of more than sentimental interest. *Antiquity*’s then editor prophesied that ‘*between thirty and fifty years from now [i.e. 1989-2009] most British universities will have Honours schools of antiquity*’, which is nearly true, or would be, if the foundation of new departments had not been outrun by the foundation of new universities. I am sure he did not predict that prehistory, so strenuously achieved, would ever be ‘dropped’ as surplus to the establishment or that whole areas of human intellect could be traded for the price of a student’s tuition fee. But then he would have been equally startled that Noahs’ Ark and Creationism were back in fashion.

It’s as plain as the trowel in your hand that the academic and conservation sectors need to work together, plan together, design projects together and write them together. But this would require a massive change in the economic drivers of both the heritage industry and the knowledge industry. The most useful initiative so far is probably Sweden’s *Proposition 177 (1993/4)* which required every archaeological firm to have a declared research base and every mitigation project in advance of development to aim at a ‘progressive research outcome’. Money would be provided within the contract to ensure that there was staff time to research the context and significance of whatever had been brought to light. Other countries have been slow to follow this lead, perhaps distracted by the accelerating process of deregulation which hands more and more of the heritage over to market forces and the negotiating skills of consultants.

Now Ireland has made its bid to join up the two arms of archaeology with its brilliant manifesto *2020: Repositioning Irish Archaeology in the Knowledge Society* (Heritage Council 2006). Its publication was followed up by a penetrating discussion in September 2006 hosted by the Royal Irish Academy. This was held under Chatham House Rules, meaning all comments were unattributable, which allowed the robes of office to be left in the cloakroom, and conviction and reason to bathe uninhibitedly in the same pool. It was an important moment in archaeology’s slow but apparently ineluctable migration from an instrument of the state to a profession selling its wares in the market place. The main messages were clear: archaeology is valuable; it is a national and international asset. It will be important to protect resources and maintain standards in fieldwork. But it will also be important to promote curiosity in research, creativity in design and selectivity in publication. Every exercise in rescue and recording must have a research dividend. The price of the contract will be for the best research that the opportunity allows, not the cheapest job a contractor and consultant can get away with. For this, the universities and the field profession must work together – as they easily could if they ‘aligned their missions’. Well done Ireland: may your archaeology prosper.

Following September’s tentative launch of our campaign for better photography, two more excellent examples follow, contributed by Peter Breunig and Charles Higham.

Martin Carver
1 December 2006



A terracotta figure of the Nok culture (500 BC-200 AD) excavated at Janjala, Central Nigeria in March 2006 by the Joint Archaeological Research project of the University of Frankfurt (Germany), the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (Nigeria) and the University of Jos (Nigeria). This can claim to be the oldest sculpture known from sub-Saharan Africa. Height : 420 mm. Courtesy of Dr Peter Breunig, University of Frankfurt. The object was illuminated with four bulbs, and the photos were taken by Barbara Voss with a digital Canon 10D with 6.5 megapixel chip. breunig@em.uni-frankfurt.de.

Editorial



A young Bronze Age individual interred in a wooden coffin with beads and vessels at Ban Non Wat, north-east Thailand about 1000 BC. The scale is 50cm. The burial was excavated during the long-term research project on the origins of Angkor led by Professor Charles Higham. The photograph was taken with a Canon powershot G6 at f2.5 and 1/50th second by Charles Higham while lying on his stomach with the camera hand held over the excavation square. charles.higham@stonebow.otago.ac.nz.