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## editorial

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### **Does the ‘archaeology of Europe’ exist? An archaeological dialogue**

Following its successful first international face-to-face debate at the 2006 meeting of the SAA in Puerto Rico, *Archaeological dialogues* has again organized a conference discussion. This time we chose the Old World to invite our readership and a wider audience, congregating at the 13th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists in Zadar, Croatia. On 21 September 2007 we held a Round Table session, sponsored by *Archaeological dialogues* and Cambridge University Press, which asked, somewhat provocatively, ‘Does the “archaeology of Europe” exist?’ Kristian Kristiansen presented a position paper on the topic, followed by responses from Old World and New World commentators Predrag Novaković, Elisabeth Jerem and Phil Kohl. This issue now presents their thoughts on this question, together with a number of comments that arose from the very lively debate at the Round Table session.

#### **Why Europe?**

*Archaeological dialogues* has long described itself as a European journal, promoting discussions which combine the theoretical and the empirical research traditions that have shaped the different archaeological schools in western, central and eastern Europe. So why should a proudly European journal organize a forum at a proudly European conference in order to challenge the very entity to which we claim to belong? One answer is that we find ourselves constantly confronted with practical and theoretical concerns about Europe, about European archaeology and about an ‘archaeology of Europe’.

What is the ultimate goal of archaeology as practised in Europe? Is it about Europe? Is it about a European past? Although today there is an awareness that archaeology is (also) about understanding contemporary societies, we nevertheless – or therefore – have to question the ways in which archaeological knowledge is used in the construction of modern identities. Moreover, we have to discuss how archaeology as a discipline is becoming or should become a European rather than a national enterprise. Is there something coherently European in the way we practise archaeology in Europe and communicate with peers across Europe?

The focus of much of current research and particularly of archaeological exhibitions has been on, for example, ‘the European Bronze Age’ or ‘the first

Europeans', placed in various epochs. Does this focus on an entity called 'Europe' also include a shift from nationalism to Europeanism? From an exclusive nationalist identity construction to a Europeanist project of creating an integrative European identity? Many of the comments published here embrace these topics. However, not surprisingly, their viewpoints are as diverse as their geographical and academic backgrounds.

Kristiansen also reminds us that prehistoric archaeology always has been integrated into society in historically specific ways; this is reflected quite clearly in the terminological shifts from 'antiquarianism' to 'CRM' and, recently, to 'heritage management'. He is dismayed not so much by a 'Europeanist' approach to archaeology as by the proliferation of regional and national ones. While recent innovations in research should direct our attention to more global problems, he argues that current research agendas stress local and national frameworks for interpretation, as an analysis of archaeological publications and teaching demonstrates (for example, in the languages and regional focus of works cited in national archaeology journals).

Kristiansen argues that 'the archaeology of Europe' is a necessary project to counteract the shrinking horizons of many national archaeologies, and the political and social consequences of nationalism. Still there is considerable debate about whether the strengthening of a 'European archaeology' is the best way to defend against nationalist archaeologies.

Thus we are not concerned so much with whether Europe itself is a Good Thing or a Bad Thing. Instead we ask specifically about the European past: is 'Europe' a meaningful or useful term for archaeology? Can we really talk about practising the archaeology *of* this entity called 'Europe', or rather of doing archaeology *in* Europe and of communicating among archaeologists *across* Europe? Does Europe have a deep past? The European Union itself would appear divided on this point. On the one hand, the EU and the European Council have supported initiatives that supposedly bring together its membership in celebration of a common heritage – the Year of the Bronze Age, for example. On the other, however, the European Union has marked the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome in 2007 with a logo stating, 'Celebrating Europe – Together since 1957'. This seems to highlight the lack of an awareness of a common European history. Is there a shared sense about the story or stories we as Europeans should tell about Europe? And are attempts to be inclusive in creating *a* European past actually exclusive by focusing on a bounded 'Europe'? Does it help our understanding of the prehistoric and historic past to think about 'Europe' as a unified area? Where are the frontiers of this unity?

### **National versus European perspectives?**

At a recent conference, while presenting the new design of the Dutch national museum, Ronald de Leeuw, the director of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, said that there will be a considerable number of paintings of sea battles showing the victory of the Dutch fleet over the British. He joked that he wants to put up a plate with the inscription 'For the battles we lost, please go to the Greenwich Maritime Museum' (Baur 2007). This little anecdote highlights a tension: some European nation states today again put a lot of

effort into debating the 'canon' of their national history, for example through the reorganization or (re)foundation of national history museums, which often, and necessarily, tell the national history as a series of struggles against oppression and aggression by other European nations or peoples, and at the same time they try to develop a European view on both history and identity.

In central Europe, former communist countries struggle to develop a new self-awareness through writing national, often ethnic, histories and archaeologies, and simultaneously trying to identify and present themselves as good (EU) Europeans. Is there thus a fruitful tension between national, European and regional issues? And does this influence our archaeological practice?

Apart from matters of inclusiveness and exclusiveness, we also face matters of increasing homogenization of archaeological practice in Europe through laws, statutes or conventions, such as the European Landscape Convention, and most recently the European Reference Index for the Humanities,<sup>1</sup> which will arrange all our journals in a European hierarchy. Our financial support is often bound up with European development plans, or tied to schemes that promote particular kinds of research and particular, politically fashionable, topics. Clearly the Bronze Age Campaign and the exhibitions on the 'First Europeans' or on Central Europe around A.D. 1000 had to do with European money and European politics.

### Continuing the dialogue

The topics addressed in Kristiansen's discussion paper and the multifaceted comments are necessarily open for further debate. The EAA meetings have seen many sessions discussing matters of communication across Europe, and of differences in field techniques, teaching, formulating research questions and so on. Still, the debate has only just begun. Surprisingly little has been published in the *EJA* or elsewhere – compared to other apparently more fashionable topics – on what an archaeology of Europe could look like beyond the demands of the European Commission, on the appearance of this archaeology and on where it should go. Thus we invite our readers to contribute to this great endeavour of creating a broad understanding of archaeological practice and thought in Europe. The editors welcome correspondence by mail or e-mail, but you can also use our new blog, the 'ArchaeoDiaBlog', that will be accessible on our webpage [www.archaeologicaldialogues.com](http://www.archaeologicaldialogues.com) by 1 September 2008. We welcome suggestions for debate, from the Old and the New Worlds.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> ERIH will provide a reference index of top journals in 15 areas of the humanities; books will also be included later.

### Reference

Baur, J., 2007: Conference review: Gedächtnis der Nationen. Neue nationale Geschichts- und Kultur Museen: Konzeptionen, Realisierung, Erwartungen. 14.-16.03.2007, Berlin, *H-Soz-u-Kult* 27.04.2007, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=1549>.