
EDITORIAL

Alan Saville

National Museums Scotland, UK

Appropriately in the run up to the 14th EAA Conference, to be held in Valletta, Malta, this issue includes three reviews of books relating to aspects of Maltese archaeology, two of them concerning the prehistoric megalithic 'temples' for which Malta has rightly long been famous. More recently, however, Malta has also become synonymous for European archaeologists with the *European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Revised)*. Thus it is equally appropriate that we have an article in this issue in which Willem Willems gives us his valuable and entertaining personal insight into the background to the creation and signing of the Malta (or Valletta) Convention in January 1992. As he explains, in terms of response to be judged by the level of signing and ratification, this Convention must be regarded as one of the Council of Europe's outstanding success stories.

But do this widespread signing and the (slightly less widespread) ratification of the Convention mean that our archaeological heritage is uniformly and satisfactorily protected throughout Europe? Many would argue that, worthy though it certainly is, the Convention provides no automatic guarantees of appropriate standards and practices. The UK Government, one of the original signatories to the Convention and ostensibly one of its main supporters, did not ratify it until 2000, with 'implementation' following in 2001. At the time this ratification created quite a flurry of vociferous protests from those who envisaged the Convention leading to highly restrictive practices, such as the licensing of all excavations and the blanket banning of the use of metal detectors. It was predicted that ultimately the Convention would lead to the complete 'death' of amateur involvement in archaeology. As it transpired this reaction was misguided in all respects, and it is actually difficult to discern anything affecting the protection of the archaeological heritage in the UK that can be related to the formal implementation of the Malta Convention. Admittedly, since 2001, there have been very few changes to the UK's primary legislation affecting the heritage (in fact little change since the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979*), and it is possible that legislation in

European Journal of Archaeology Vol. 10(1): 5–6
Copyright © 2007 SAGE Publications ISSN 1461–9571 DOI:10.1177/1461957108091479

the future may reflect the existence of the Convention. After all, to take an historical perspective, some of the spirit and content of the original *European Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage* of 1969 (the London Convention), ratified by the UK Government in 1972 and implemented in 1973, did come to be reflected (though not specifically mentioned) in the 1979 Act. As I write this editorial, however, it can be noted that the Scottish Government has just issued a consultative draft of its proposed new *Planning and the Historic Environment* policy, which will replace the existing national guidelines on *Archaeology and Planning*. The new policy, although it interestingly takes account of the Council of Europe's *European Landscape Convention*, makes no reference whatsoever to the Valletta Convention.

It would be of considerable interest to have a comparative study from across Europe of the degree to which the existence of the Malta Convention has impacted on practice and legislation concerning protection of the heritage. As it happens, this is arguably something which would be facilitated by another of the Council of Europe's initiatives, the *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, otherwise known as the Faro Convention of 2005. Article 15a of this Convention commits parties to 'develop, through the Council of Europe, a monitoring function covering legislations, policies and practices concerning cultural heritage'. The catch is that very few countries have so far opted to sign this Convention and, as of March 2008, only three countries have ratified it, thus leaving the Convention in limbo and unlikely to come into force. Whether this reflects concerns that the Convention is too nebulous or too potentially political, or simply that it is too wide-ranging to fit the portfolios of relevant national ministries which would need to promote its adoption, is difficult to tell. Many of the articles in the Faro Convention, however, do chime very closely with the values and aspirations of the EAA.

Perhaps ironically, since it is one of the few countries that has not even signed, let alone ratified, the Valletta Convention, Iceland is the setting for the first contribution in this issue. Lucas and McGovern discuss the interpretation of the faunal remains from a Viking settlement site and their possible significance for identifying special social practice. From Slovenia, which has both signed and ratified the Valletta Convention and is one of the few signatories of the Faro Convention, we have an article by Hrobat which uses a case study to explore the possibility, validity and difficulties of using folklore as part of our armoury for exploring the archaeological past. Finally in this issue, as already mentioned, Willems looks back at the Valletta Convention and comes to some provocative conclusions for the EAA to consider.

The Assistant Reviews Editor has put together a special reviews section for this issue, looking at aspects of contemporary archaeological practice and some of the uses of archaeology in various modern media. We hope this will stimulate other contributors to consider writing for the *EJA* about ways in which archaeology variously impacts upon modern culture.