

Editorial

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Welcome to the first issue of the *European Journal of Archaeology* for 2014. Here, you will find, in addition to four general articles and eleven reviews, a special section dedicated to the work of the Medieval Europe Research Committee (MERC) which recently strengthened its relationship with the EAA. Below, I summarize and assess the significance to European archaeology of all the contributions in this issue.

Alejandra Sánchez-Polo and Antonio Blanco-González seek to identify and interpret site formation and abandonment processes at the relatively well-preserved Middle Bronze Age settlement site of El Cerro in the central tablelands of Spain. They point out that this site presents a number of distinctive depositional features, including a hollow containing the unusual burial of three children claimed to be siblings who died at the same time. They go on to propose that the trauma of this tragic event triggered a series of special depositions at the site, including some unusual deposits of objects from earlier time periods, and also the abandonment of the settlement. This is a challenging paper that is of more than local or regional importance because it contributes not only to the long-running debate over ‘placed’ or ‘structured’ deposition (particularly at British prehistoric sites) but also to current debates over the nature and significance of artefact fragmentation and of deviant burial.

Robyn Veal highlights the valuable input that charcoal analysis can provide to archaeological research on ancient economies, even when using samples derived from routine dry-sieving of excavated sediments through a 5 mm mesh. Her example focuses on the evidence of fuel consumption from a wealthy house in the Roman city of Pompeii—the long-lived House of the Vestals. Here, 50–75 per cent of the fuel was identified as beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), which is likely to have been imported as wood or charcoal to the city over considerable distances, including from the Lattari Mountains situated 15 km away. Experts in anthracology may wish to debate Veal’s advocacy of dry-sieving and hand-picking over flotation in the recovery of charcoal samples, but her article remains a useful reminder to field archaeologists to collect and record charcoal fragments as carefully as they would any other category of archaeological data.

Anna Kjellström adds to our knowledge of historic people in northern Europe with modified teeth, through a detailed osteoarchaeological study of new examples from cemeteries in the Mälaren Valley in Sweden, including at the Viking trading-post of Birka and the successive medieval town of Sigtuna. The affected individuals had between one and four modified maxillary teeth marked by horizontal furrows and polished facets. Kjellström confirms that such modification was entirely associated with adult men, some of whom were associated with weapons and violent acts. However, she also argues that the modifications continued beyond the Viking period into the early Middle Ages and that they have a heterogeneous character. This suggests that they

cannot simply be interpreted as examples of intentional Viking body decoration. Frustrating as this conclusion may be, Kjellström's caution is appropriate, particularly when dealing with a topic that has already received international press coverage.

David Gaimster usefully synthesizes the outstanding knowledge he has developed over the last two decades of Hanseatic trade and cultural exchange in northern Europe and the Baltic in the late Middle Ages. Instead of presenting Hanseatic merchants in purely economic terms, Gaimster encourages us to understand the Hansa as a new social and cultural order with a distinctive material (including ceramic) signature that was widely established through the development of a very successful trade and exchange alliance. As Gaimster points out, the archaeology of the Hansa also has the potential to contribute to wider debates about the history of Europeanization and proto-globalization.

Opening our MERC special section, Martin Carver, the current Chair of MERC, provides a brief background on the origins and development of MERC, first as a research congress and now as a research committee affiliated with the EAA. He also comments on the two MERC articles published here: one concerned with terrestrial archaeology, the other maritime archaeology. These were originally presented as keynote papers at a MERC session of the 18th Annual Meeting of the EAA held in Helsinki in 2012, exploring the present and future research agenda for Medieval Europe.

Rainer Schreg provides not only a broad overview of rural studies related to the Middle Ages in Europe but also a pioneering attempt to rethink how medieval rural archaeology might be practiced using the approach of cultural ecology. In particular, he advocates studying landscapes and medieval institutions, like the rural village, from an ecological and environmental perspective, but with the addition of elements that have often been neglected in ecological studies—the historical, human, social, and economic dimensions, including power over resources, and the interplay between nature and human agency. It is from this perspective that Schreg's core concept of the village ecosystem is derived. This important article is, consequently, not only relevant to medieval rural archaeology, but also to medieval archaeology as a whole and to landscape archaeology.

Christer Westerdahl's article for medieval maritime archaeology likewise advocates a change in attitude. It calls upon maritime archaeologists to think beyond shipwrecks and ship technologies (including the revered medieval cog), and to question the nationalist bias inherent in some of this work, in order to pursue a new research agenda concerned with maritime cultural landscapes, the life course of sailors, religious belief, cosmology, emotions, and other cognitive factors. Will maritime archaeologists take up this challenge?

Turning to the reviews, we begin with the latest book by archaeological theorist Gavin Lucas, whose consideration of the relationship between archaeological methods and archaeological theories of materiality and agency wins praise—perhaps surprisingly—from an American behavioural archaeologist. Next comes Ian Armit's thoughtful review of a new book on the archaeology of violence, then acclaim by James Whitley for John Bintliff's achievement of the seemingly impossible task of writing 'The Complete Archaeology of Greece'. Next we turn to a series of more specialized yet still wide-ranging books dealing with: human responses to climate change during the Younger Dryas; funerary practices in Iberian prehistory; the landscapes of Neolithic Brittany; social encounters and transformations towards the end of the Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean; Bronze Age spearheads in Britain; a Bronze Age village in Northern

Ireland; and life in Medieval landscapes. We then end with an overview of a new biography of Champollion, whose achievements as the ‘father of Egyptology’ are reconsidered in context. At this point, I should like to thank Leonardo García Sanjuán for all his hard and efficient work over the last three years as the *EJA*’s Reviews Editor, and to welcome Estella Weiss-Krejci into this demanding role, as well as Marta Díaz-Guardamino as her Assistant Reviews Editor.

If you are interested in submitting an article on any aspect of European archaeology, or have recently published a book that you would like us to review, or have a suggestion for a special issue of the *EJA*, do please get in touch with a member of our editorial team or visit us on <http://www.maney.co.uk/index.php/journals/eja/>.