
EDITORIAL

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Unexpectedly, Christmas-time 2006 arrived before I had the chance to write this editorial, which explains why I am able to reflect on two recent news items that have just caught my eye. The first is that groups of people, variously described in the British press as pagans, druids, pantheists, wizards and so on, had turned up at Stonehenge to celebrate the winter solstice one day too early. That is to say, they arrived on 21 December for their celebration, whereas, since the official consensus was that the astronomical moment of the solstice in this time zone fell at 00:22 am on the following day, English Heritage had agreed with most representatives of those wishing to celebrate that in 2006 the winter solstice festivities at Stonehenge would take place on 22 December. One unfazed spokesperson for the celebrants was quoted as saying 'pagans are not entirely scientific; they are more guided by nature'.

This brings me to the second item in the news, which was that 'nature' – in the form of freezing fog – had totally disrupted flights in and out of London's Heathrow airport for more than three days. We must assume that freezing fog was a likely occurrence at this time of year in prehistory as well, and that it would on occasion have played havoc with whatever winter solstice activities there may have been. Appreciation of the winter solstice sun's rays at the tombs of Newgrange, Co. Meath, Ireland, and Maeshowe, Orkney, Scotland (Ruggles 1999:129) could have been ruined by prehistoric freezing fog, with who knows what disappointment or worse for anyone in charge of celebrations. And if we believe that the rising or setting midwinter sun at Stonehenge was of significance in prehistoric times for at least some phases of its construction (Darvill 2006:143), then what effect might the occasional complete invisibility of that sun for days on end have had? The non-appearance of the sun at Stonehenge on the morning of 22 December 2006 does not seem to have unduly upset today's revellers (e.g. see videos of the event on *YouTube*), since presumably the breaking of dawn was sufficient reassurance that the sun had indeed risen (been reborn), even if it could not be seen. Perhaps our prehistoric ancestors were equally sanguine?

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For the first time since I took over the editorship of this journal there is an article in this issue which relates to my own research interests in lithic studies. Allard has been analysing the particularly rich and informative lithic finds from the Linear-bandkeramik site at Verlaine, near Liège in Belgium. Using extensive refitting as part of reconstructing the *chaîne opératoire* he identifies specialist knapping as part of a 'production economy' whereby flint blades are produced in large numbers for long-distance distribution. This is but one aspect of the archaeological data recovered from this important site which has much to contribute to our understanding of early Neolithic society.

Halkon and Innes tackle the question of change through prehistoric time in a single region in their study of part of Yorkshire, England. They review, necessarily in summary form, the evidence from the Mesolithic period through to the Iron Age. Inevitably the nature of the evidence itself changes through time, but in contextualizing the available data in landscape terms the authors come to a conclusion which stresses the importance of location, insofar as the palaeoenvironmental constraints can be reconstructed, on the lives of prehistoric people. Perhaps running somewhat counter to current fashion in archaeological theory they see a significant, if not a completely paramount, role for the changing local environment in influencing aspects of change in prehistoric society.

The final article in this issue is a review article by Leighton in which he assesses the current state of knowledge of later prehistory in Sicily, primarily as gained by non-invasive survey work. As with the previous article by Halkon and Innes, this case study will be of interest not just to archaeologists working on the region in question, but as an example of analytical methodology for looking at change through time.

Readers will notice a bumper crop of book reviews in this issue, covering a wide range of publications concerned with aspects of archaeology from the Palaeolithic period to the present day. The ever increasing number of books being sent for possible review and our desire to announce their existence more rapidly, has led us to discontinue the list of *Books Received* in this journal in preference for regular listing of new books not to be reviewed on the EAA weblog (<http://eja.e-e-a.org>).

REFERENCES

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