



*Emptying the entrance of a Meroitic grave at Sedeinga (Sudan, December 2012). The grave was found during the construction of a road connecting Sudan to Egypt. It is the biggest grave ever discovered in the region for the Kingdom of Meroe (with  $^{14}\text{C}$  dating around the second century BC). Far from the Nile and the villages, it took several weeks for a team of workers and archaeologists to remove the windblown sand accumulated in the stairs, before being able to access the funerary chamber. Image by Vincent Francigny, American Museum of Natural History.*



*Two boats sail across the wall of Kabori Burrow, Muna Island, south-east Sulawesi, Indonesia. In addition to the paintings of the boats, there are depictions of humans and animals as well as the sun. There are some 130 prehistoric paintings in the caves area dating to around the twelfth century BC, illustrating the history of the Muna people of Sulawesi. The local transition from hunting and gathering to farming is depicted by paintings of coconuts, corn and tubers in four other sites in the area: the Sugi Patani Cave, Pominasa Cave, Pinda Niche and La Kubah Niche. In addition to the paintings, the tombs of several Muna kings have also been found around Kabori Burrow. Image by Puji Rianti.*

# EDITORIAL

## *What lies beneath?*

When archaeologists in Britain begin to excavate a greenfield site, they regularly strip away the loose ploughsoil to get down as quickly as possible to something solid and undisturbed. The mechanical digger is followed by a line of people armed with hoes and trowels who clean back the surface to reveal pits, postholes, ditches and anything else that emerges. Typically, some or all of these will then be excavated and ascribed to one or more periods of occupation or activity. So what we have is a kind of palimpsest, where archaeological traces from the Palaeolithic to the present day appear truncated in the same stratigraphic horizon, cut into the subsoil. But are we missing something? What might we learn from the ploughsoil itself?

That is the question posed by Chris Evans, Jonathan Tabor and Marc Vander Linden in this issue of *Antiquity*. The large, open-area excavations associated with developer-funded operations produce complicated site plans. Typically there might be a handful of Neolithic features, more of them from the Bronze Age and Iron Age, and large numbers of Roman and medieval, but with breaks in the sequence that suggest that occupation and activity may have come and gone, that for certain periods that piece of the landscape may have fallen out of use or been abandoned. But is that the whole story? Working on 'islands' in the Fenlands of eastern England, Evans and his colleagues have shown how the topsoil tells a different tale. By hand-digging large numbers of test pits, and sample excavation of sub-soil deposits, they revealed just how much of the past we might be missing by conventional surface stripping strategies—a barrow cemetery where burials were laid on the ground surface, the middens associated with a Late Bronze Age settlement, or the very slight traces of Iron Age round houses.

This is an important lesson, and one not restricted to north-west Europe. If we are trying to calculate the densities of prehistoric occupation and activity, we should not rely on pits and postholes alone. The densities of occupation may often indeed have been much greater than the excavated record initially suggests. The same goes for more recent periods. Recent research in Italy has moved away from major villa sites in search of the peasantry who were the backbone of the Roman population. On the surface there are scatters of pottery and building debris; but excavation rarely reveals a well preserved domestic settlement. The surviving remains of these less substantial sites are now, after centuries of cultivation, trapped entirely within the ploughsoil. That is not for a moment to suggest that we abandon our mechanical diggers and excavate everything by hand; that would be entirely unrealistic. But we do need to think carefully about the inferences that we are drawing.

## *New arrangements at English Heritage?*

In the Editorial to the September 2013 issue we briefly mentioned the proposal to split English Heritage, the body primarily responsible for protecting archaeological sites and advising the government in England. This proposal has now taken detailed form in a Consultation Document setting out the government's 8-year 'vision' for

the historic environment to 2023 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/english-heritage-new-model-consultation>). One half of English Heritage will keep the existing name and look after what has become known as the National Heritage Collection, around 440 sites and buildings that are owned by the state or in government guardianship, and open to the public. There will be some government money for this in the early stages, and above all £80 million initial funding to clear the conservation backlog and invest in new and renewed visitor exhibitions and other projects. In addition, the consultation envisages that the new body will somehow raise £83.4m of 'third-party funding' over the 8-year period. By moving to charitable status the new body will be free to raise money from sponsorship in a less restricted way than before, 'from a wider range of companies', in addition to the grants, donations and legacies that it already receives.

Are these proposals a good thing? The financial calculations give some cause for concern. The 'third-party funding', for example, makes reference to recent grants and donations for Stonehenge (£16.7m) and Kenwood House (£5m), but it might be more prudent to regard these as special cases rather than the basis for ongoing, year-on-year projections. The average site will not be capable of generating that kind of income and one might wonder whether attention in future is going to focus on income generation at the expense of other criteria. Much will depend on whether the sums really add up. If not, the rosy future that is set out in these proposals will prove simply a smoke screen for the removal of central government funding. At the same time, it could be argued that the archaeological heritage is safer removed from the vagaries of changing government policies and priorities. But one wonders whether a better arrangement still might have been achieved by negotiations with an existing national heritage organisation such as the National Trust.

The remainder of English Heritage will undergo a subtle change of name to 'Historic England'. It will continue to be responsible for the heritage protection system and for saving heritage at risk. One key objective is to provide a more responsive service for owners and developers, 'reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape without reducing protection for heritage'. Efficiency is to be applauded, but exactly how the new priorities will play out remains to be seen. There is clearly a danger here that once the well-known sites are transferred to the new English Heritage, the role of Historic England will steadily contract under pressure from developers and from government spending cuts. Furthermore, while the proposals make clear that the National Heritage Collection will still be the guardian of last resort for buildings or monuments that are at risk and have no other saviour, if the NHC is entirely dependent for its income on grants, donations, corporate sponsorship and visitor entry fees, then its resources are going to be strictly limited. Will it be able to step in whenever the need arises, even for sites or buildings that may have little potential for income generation?

Once the new arrangements are confirmed, Historic England and English Heritage in its new guise will both come into being in January 2015.

### *Stonehenge*

 England's premier prehistoric monument figures prominently in the English Heritage Consultation Document. To much fanfare in the press, the long-awaited Visitor Centre

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opened in December 2013. We will be running a full review feature in the next issue of *Antiquity*, but the new centre has already drawn fire from the Council of British Druid Orders for its display of human skeletal material, which they would like to see reburied. Our own attempt to visit the new Visitor Centre shortly after it opened was foiled by the weather: we arrived mid-afternoon to find the car park closed and a steward turning us away because of the cold wind and rain. We'll hope for better luck next time!

### *Managing Angkor*

☞ The new Stonehenge Visitor Centre is the response to long-standing dissatisfaction with the visitor arrangements. It is far from being the only famous monument where tourists are proving both a bane and a blessing.



*Conservation work in progress on one of the brick-built sanctuary towers at the late ninth-century temple of Lolei, south-east of Angkor.*

The very successful 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association (IPPA) was held at Siem Reap in Cambodia in January this year, hosted by the Royal Academy of Cambodia. The meeting gave delegates the chance to learn of new discoveries, to renew academic acquaintances, and to debate issues of common concern throughout the region. The latter is extensive and heterogeneous, encompassing islands, coasts and countryside from the Indus to Easter Island and Peru. There were over 700 participants from 40 countries, and close to 600 papers were delivered over the six-day period. Patterns of human colonisation in the Pleistocene and Holocene were much in discussion, along with maritime contacts in prehistoric and historic times, and the emergence of the great medieval empires, to name but a few of the varied themes.

For many conference delegates this was also an excellent opportunity to visit the temples, other monuments and landscape of Angkor. Greater Angkor, the vast medieval urban complex and capital of the Khmer Empire from the ninth to the fifteenth century AD, is on a scale that is hard to grasp. The walled town of twelfth-century London could have fitted comfortably 10 times over within the vast rectangular reservoir of the West Baray, and the latter is only one of the major components of Angkor. It was only with the systematic use of radar in the 1990s and then lidar in 2012 that the structure and settlement pattern of the site began to become clear. Radar and aerial photography revealed the full extent of Greater Angkor. Lidar revealed the detail of the road grid, water tanks and occupation mounds of central Angkor. The major public buildings have long been known—Angkor Wat was never abandoned or forgotten and remains in use as a Buddhist shrine to the present



*Delegates from the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association visit the ancient Khmer capital of Angkor Thom, near Siem Reap, Cambodia.*

day—but the complex system of canals, roads and reservoirs, and the fields and houses of the ordinary populace, are only now beginning to be comprehensively understood. New discoveries continue to be made within the major temples too: our June issue will carry an account of painted imagery recently revealed in the galleries of Angkor Wat.

Angkor was added to the World Heritage List in 1992 but was immediately highlighted as under threat. It has since been taken off the list of threatened sites but tourism numbers have rocketed during the past few years, and like Lascaux and other World Heritage Sites, Angkor risks becoming a victim of its own success. In 2013, more than two million tourists visited Angkor Wat, a 20 per cent increase on 2012, and 10 times as many as those who visited in 2003. The visitors bring much needed income, but pose the challenge of tourist management on a grand scale. One only has to see the crowds walking the vast causeway to Angkor Wat or filing past the spectacular low-relief friezes around the outer enclosure of the temple to appreciate the problem. The Angkor Wat friezes are among the longest in the world. Here you can see King Suryavarman II mounted splendidly on his war elephant while the Khmer army goes into battle around him. Turn the corner, and gods and demons in an immense tug-of-war pull to and fro on a huge serpent to churn the ocean of milk and free the elixir of immortality. Nor is it only Angkor Wat that is under pressure. The impressive Bayon at the heart of the city enclosure of Angkor Thom is another favourite destination, and some of the other temples are becoming famous in their own ways: Ta Prohm, for example, draws crowds through its managed but forested condition, with temple structures entangled among the roots of massive silk-cotton trees. But if all this is to be preserved,

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the pressure from tourism needs to be managed. The Royal Cambodian Government has been working with UNESCO and foreign partners to develop a Heritage Management Framework, and IPPA itself is drawing up an Angkor Declaration calling for multilateral cooperation for the protection and conservation of Angkor and other vulnerable heritage sites in Cambodia.

The overwhelming impression from both the IPPA meeting and Angkor is of the huge potential of Cambodian archaeology. It has seen difficult times during recent decades, but the Cambodian APSARA heritage authority and the Cambodian archaeologists we met showed great energy and commitment. And of course the splendours of Angkor shouldn't blind us to the wealth of Cambodian archaeology more generally, especially its prehistory and the 'Middle Period' (fifteenth to nineteenth centuries AD). It is certainly one to watch for the future.

### *Reburial and Richard III*

It is not only at Stonehenge that reburial is proving a contentious issue. The colonial era of collecting indigenous human remains has long gone, and restitution to the descendants for appropriate and respectful burial is something on which virtually all archaeologists now agree. The same applies quite widely to human remains of recent centuries. In Britain and elsewhere, recent skeletons disinterred by developer-funded archaeologists are reburied (after scientific study) in consecrated ground. That assumes of course that they were Christians, and would have expected to receive a Christian burial. Local clergy sometimes hold special ceremonies to rebury the bones dug up from medieval graves, in respect for what we presume to have been the wishes of the dead. Prehistoric remains, of course, raise different issues, and curation of human material for specialist study and analysis continues to be challenged in some quarters. Despite occasional claims to the contrary, however, we don't know what the prehistoric dead expected in death. We don't really understand their religious beliefs and can't say for certain how they wished to be buried or why, and it is difficult to know how best to proceed. In addition, the scientific value of their remains is such that reburial is not generally desired by archaeologists, or not at least in the immediate term.

The reburial issue has been given a slightly different twist by the argument over the burial thought to be that of Richard III (killed in battle in 1485), which was reported in the June 2013 issue of *Antiquity*. The plan was to rebury the skeleton in a specially designed tomb in the cathedral at Leicester, not far from the place where it was found. It is fair to assume that a fifteenth-century English nobleman would have expected to be buried in a major church; in that regard his wishes are being respected. What is not known is whether he would have chosen to be buried in Leicester, had he had a voice in the matter. The alternative, being urged by the Plantagenet Alliance, is for reburial in York Minster, the premier religious centre in northern England, and a place that is known to have had connections with Richard III. The struggle between the pro-York and pro-Leicester parties has been running for over a year, and has received fresh impetus from an official ruling allowing for a judicial review. The cynical may wonder why the issue of location is so important. After all, Richard III's reputation may have been unfairly blackened by Polydore Vergil and other Tudor propagandists, but he was certainly no saint. The whole debate is a

reminder of the symbolic power of the dead and their remains, and the issues that digging them up can provoke.

### *Archaeological photographs*

📷 A key product of all modern excavations is a set of photographs. Some of these are carefully framed and posed, almost like stage sets; and as has often been noted, excavation photographs have their own aesthetic. Others are informal or impromptu, some of them taken not by a professional site photographer but by other members of the team, or by visitors. They too can be an invaluable source of information, often revealing details that only become important with hindsight.

A new project based in the Netherlands is seeking to collect together ‘non-professional’ photographs, in order to digitise them and make them available to both scholars and the public. The Non-Professional Archaeological Photographs Project, led by Bart Wagemakers from Utrecht, is based on the principle that non-professionals often photograph features or stages of an excavation that escape official coverage. Anyone interested in helping to expand this resource is asked to contact the project directly (see the Project Gallery article at <http://antiquity.ac.uk/projgall/wagemakers338/>). There is also a more general principle here. As photography migrates from one medium to another, there is a danger that valuable older collections of prints, negatives or slides may be damaged, discarded or destroyed. More projects like this one are needed.

### *Archaeology and war*

📷 The year 2014 marks the centenary of one of the most climactic events in European history: the First World War. Already in Britain debate has begun over the merits of the military strategies adopted on the Western Front; what is beyond question is the enormous human cost with tens of thousands killed or wounded on the first day of the Somme offensive alone. The archaeology of the War has been gaining increasing prominence in recent years, and has featured in *Antiquity* (2002 (vol. 76): 101–108; 2006 (vol. 80): 161–72). As individual memories fade, material evidence comes to light to remind us of the conditions in which the conflict was waged. Trenches and dugouts are uncovered in advance of development, and war graves revealed, not to mention the military installations away from the fighting front: hospitals, practice trenches, airfields and prison camps. They are a reminder that archaeology is not just about the distant past, but covers the physical traces of events that have shaped the modern world in more recent times.

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Durham, 1 March 2014