

Editorial

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Welcome to the third and final issue of the *European Journal of Archaeology* for 2011, published – in this transitional year for the Journal – by the European Association of Archaeologists for members of the EAA and for the benefit of the wider academic and professional community interested in European archaeology. In this issue, you will find five major articles, eleven book reviews, and an exciting innovation for the *EJA* – four commentaries on one of the articles and a response from its co-authors, intended to provide you with a thought-provoking insight into the current state-of-play with a hotly-debated topic in European prehistory. Below, I summarize and offer some thoughts on these contributions.

Vicki Cummings and Ollie Harris re-enter the contentious and long-running debate over the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition in Britain. They portray previously published interpretations as largely polarised between arguments for either colonisation by continental farmers or indigenous hunter-gatherer continuity and agency. Instead, focussing on archaeological evidence that they interpret in terms of continuity of hunting and gathering practices and beliefs, they propose a model where multiple incoming and indigenous groups and lifeways contributed to, were affected by, and emerged out of a complex process of transformation. In commenting on this article, Julian Thomas questions Cummings and Harris' characterisation of the debate in simple terms of 'migrationist' and 'indigenist' perspectives, and their consequent claim to a new middle position. Nevertheless, he agrees with much that they write, despite being somewhat frustrated by the lack of clarity as to what their transformation process would have involved. In his opinion, the tipping point in the transformation lay in the internal dynamics of British Mesolithic societies. Josh Pollard likewise concurs with Cummings and Harris' complex, multi-agent construction of the transition, and their emphasis on practices. However, he is concerned about the authors' use of the concept of 'continuity', which he describes as 'slippery and poorly theorized'. Arek Marciniak offers a wider European perspective, calling for a more convincing account of Neolithic continental farming communities, and particularly of farming groups inhabiting Brittany and Normandy prior to the British Neolithic. He also agrees with the authors' emphasis on the social and spiritual significance of animals (alongside their dietary importance), but calls for further thinking about the classification of the animal world in the Mesolithic and Neolithic. Finally, Alison Sheridan accuses Cummings and Harris of misrepresenting her own thinking about the transition, and calls for their arguments to be better grounded in archaeological evidence, including that found in northern France, and tested through new fieldwork. In response, Cummings and Harris acknowledge that their characterisation of continental farming communities was insufficiently detailed, but fight back in particular against Sheridan's criticisms. I leave you to make up your own minds on the various aspects of this challenging debate, where clearly only the brave should dare to tread!

Jessica Beckett presents the results of her well-integrated taphonomic, osteological and archaeological analyses of human burial practices performed at megalithic monuments on the Burren (an extensive karst landscape) in the Mid-West of Ireland. Her sample comprises three excavated sites, each representing a different type of Neolithic burial monument. Having taken into account different environmental processes and excavation methods, Beckett is able to distinguish the taphonomic histories of the three sites, and to re-interpret their 'secondary burials' in terms of overlapping but also distinct disposal sequences and activities. At Parknabinnia chambered tomb, numerous successive primary inhumations, followed by secondary manipulation of the decomposing bodies, continued over many generations; at the commemorative cairn of Poulawack, only four articulated bodies were deposited, then later disturbed and manipulated *in situ*, before the cist was permanently sealed; whereas, at Poulabrone, long bones were removed from the portal tomb from decayed articulated bodies. From a European point of view, these results can be compared to similar studies in regions such as England, France and the Iberian peninsula, including the taphonomic work of Henri Duday, whose translated book, *The Archaeology of the Dead: Lectures in Archaeoanthatology*, is reviewed in this issue of the *EJA*.

Tim Earle and his colleagues explore the question of whether or not market systems had developed in Hungary during the Bronze Age, particularly in the Benta Valley, located on the main trade corridor of the Danube. They do so through a detailed analysis of everyday ceramics collected from Bronze Age settlements in the valley, combining quantification of ceramic forms and decoration, petrographic analysis and instrumental neutron activation analysis (INAA), aimed at defining the relative numbers of potters and the probable extent of ceramic exchange. They conclude that, although ceramic production was quite sophisticated and probably specialized, exchange was highly localized and conducted through socially-embedded community networks – quite the opposite of market-like exchange. This is a valuable piece of research, whose consideration of the presence of pottery in everyday life represents a marked departure from the hitherto dominant tradition of pottery studies in Central Europe, with their focus on chronology and typology.

Julie Lund and Lene Melheim offer a critical reinterpretation of the Late Bronze Age Vestby hoard from south-east Norway, in response to previous archaeological studies of Bronze Age metal production and cosmology. Their ideas are based upon a detailed consideration of the embodied crafting, biographies and cosmological symbolism of metal objects ritually deposited in the hoard. These include a pair of animal figurines – with heads mounted on bodies of different animal species, three similar neck rings with ship ornaments – each produced by different methods, and a bead necklace – without parallel in Scandinavia – interpreted as a lunar calendar. In sum, the authors provide a sophisticated and thought-provoking narrative, which makes a significant contribution to our understanding of artefact biographies and of the role of the smith in Bronze Age cosmologies.

Nathan Schlanger returns to the pages of the *EJA* with an argument that John Evans, the renowned nineteenth century antiquarian, was essentially a numismatist, and that he consequently transferred some well-established methods of coin studies (documentation, authentication and interpretation) to his pioneering and influential study of ancient stone implements. As Schlanger points out, this has implications for our understanding of the birth of prehistoric archaeology in general and of Palaeolithic

archaeology in particular, which, although traditionally linked to the emergence of natural sciences such as geology, palaeontology and zoology and Darwin's evolutionism, may now need to take greater account of the impact of humanistic antiquarianism. Although historians of archaeology might wish to argue over the precise part played by Evans – compared to other researchers – in the study of Palaeolithic artefacts in the 1860s and 1870s, Schlanger's thoughts are certainly interesting, important and timely.

Finally, our reviewers summarize and evaluate a variety of recently published books of relevance to European archaeology. Of particular note is Howard Williams' endorsement of *Archaeology and the Sea in Scandinavia and Britain: A Personal Account*, written by Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, the distinguished Danish maritime archaeologist and founder of the Viking Ship Museum, who sadly passed away in October. The following reviews then extend from books covering themes of relevance to archaeological theory and method (materiality, rock art, human taphonomy, and archaeological writing), to a group of three books on the Bronze Age (interaction in the Eastern Mediterranean, rock art in south-west Sweden, and the end of the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean), to books on rural landscapes of the Punic world and miniature votive offerings in Roman northwest Europe, to a pair of books on archaeology in the modern world.

I hope you find something of interest in this issue of the *EJA*. And do remember, we are always on the lookout for new articles to publish in the Journal that represent the best research on European archaeology and its place in the world today, irrespective of period, region or theme.

The General Editor
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