



*Following the Emperor Trajan's annexation of the Nabataean kingdom in AD 106, a great programme of construction followed. One of the most striking survivals of all that work is the great highway fanfared on the milestones as 'The New Trajanic Highway running from the borders of Syria as far as the Red Sea', a distance of c. 350km. In places it followed, broadly, the line of the ancient King's Highway but throughout it has now been formalised as a constructed road with milestones and regular road stations and bridges. In this stretch in northern Jordan, just north-east of the modern Mafraq, the foundations, complete with side kerbs and central spine, are well-preserved over several miles where it is following a likely Nabataean track. Fossil water drilling has brought widespread irrigation farming and as the photograph of 2006 shows, ploughing is now dangerously close and soon likely to begin eating away the road as has occurred elsewhere in recent years. APA\_2006-09-11\_DLK-179 (VNT W of Jimal). Photograph by David Kennedy (dkennedy@cyllene.uwa.edu.au).*



*Despite generations of looting, very large quantities of Bronze Age grave goods remain in the hundreds of chamber tombs at Deneia in Cyprus. Here students from La Trobe University, Melbourne, sample material from Kafkalla Tomb 789 in 2004. A Middle Bronze Age Red Polished ware bowl (P247) from Tomb 789 is covered with deeply incised geometric patterns typical of the site. The context and significance of the research is described by Webb and Frankel (this volume). Top: Kafkalla Tomb 789. Photograph by David Frankel (8/11/2004; Nikon Coolpix 4500 Compact Digital, 7.9mm lens). Below: Red Polished ware bowl from Tomb 789 (P247): height = 10cm, rim diameter = 17cm. Photograph by Rudy Frank (2/12/2004; Pentax \*istD Digital SLR). Photographs provided by Jennifer Webb (jenny.webb@latrobe.edu.au).*

# EDITORIAL

☞ The archaeology profession, not yet half a century old, has had plenty of ups and downs. Is it now facing an abyss? Maybe it is time to reconsider how we ply our trade – whether what we do should be a function of the state, the university or the market place. Kenny Aitchison's 'Archaeology and the global financial crisis,' published online in this issue<sup>1</sup>, is essential reading – especially for the many archaeologists currently earning a living in commercial companies. The industry they belong to – a consequence of using the private sector to rescue archaeological data through the planning system – largely shares its feeding grounds with the building business. Recently, times have been good. In 2004 developers in Britain paid archaeologists round about £144m to investigate land in advance of construction. By 2007 there was one archaeologist for every 8750 people in the UK compared with 1 in 46 700 in Germany and a remarkable 1 in 2340 in Ireland. But by the end of 2008 incomes and jobs were on the way down in the UK as in Ireland and Japan. Aitchison describes how the UK industry coped with previous downturns in the 1980s and 1990s, often achieving salvation through large government-funded infrastructure projects – and this may happen again. But we must wonder if this economic roller-coaster, which loses our subject many talented people and jeopardises its rigorous procedures, is also skewing the past. Each generation prides itself in getting by, and in this one, as Aitchison advises, '*individual archaeologists will have to adopt an entrepreneurial attitude to ensure that they are as employable as possible*'. Clearly so, but what of the archaeology itself – are our methods of investigation sufficiently robust and self-monitoring to cope with a capricious market in which value does not translate seamlessly into price? Do we want feistier enterprise or more public ownership?

Countries which view the archaeological process as a public service managed by the State can be forgiven a certain smugness at this point – employment and quality control are no doubt safe in their hands. The French state-based *Inrap* (Institut national de recherches archéologiques préventives) which draws a statutory income from developers, matches costs to tasks rather than to what the market will bear. Here funding is not the major difficulty, but government caps on employment which generate delays, irritating both developers and politicians. Recent attempts to curb these delays by amending the law do not bode well for heritage protection, let alone the respect of national and international legislation. All the same, there are advantages in centralisation. The January *Inrap* newsletter announced the evaluation phases of the 100km Seine-North Europe canal, which affects an area of 2000 hectares. Together with the follow-up investigations these are expected to comprise '*an ambitious programme for numerous archaeologists who will be mobilised on sites up to 2011*'. Echoing Kenny Aitchison, our correspondent Nathan Schlanger writes '*it is hoped that archaeologists will be recruited for this purpose, rather than drained away from other regions and projects where they are just as much needed*'.

☞ Late in 2008 British universities were also reminded that they are creatures of the state when the results of the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) were announced. A panel of

<sup>1</sup> *Kenneth Aitchison. Archaeology and the global financial crisis* - <http://antiquity.ac.uk/ProjGall/aitchison/index.html>

peer-reviewers read four selected publications from each member of staff produced during the review period. These were given marks, from 4 (internationally excellent) to 1 (not very interesting), and the scores averaged over the department as a whole. The result was a 'profile', i.e. the percentages of 4, 3, 2 and 1 achieved, and the profiles allowed the archaeology departments in the UK (there were 22 assessed) to be put into an order. Durham came top and good luck to them, with Reading as runner up and good luck to them too.

Meanwhile in Scandinavia, assessment is to be applied to individual lecturers, graded according to where they publish. Publication in a 'Level 1' output (the lowest) awards 1 point for an ISSN article and 5 points for an ISBN monograph. Publication at Level 2 (the top 20 per cent) earns 3 points for an article and 8 points for a book. Articles in edited volumes are not highly rated – even at level 2 they only score 1 point. The implication is the same – international is better than national is better than regional.

The British Research Councils are now a subset of the Office of Science and Technology – in other words all research is science or should be, even the humanities. A good result won in Britain should have impact everywhere. Does archaeology work like this? In one sense we are the most global subject in the world; all peoples have a past even if they don't have a car industry or a nuclear accelerator. In another, all archaeology is local history, and the diversity of the earth (for which sensible humans give thanks daily) carries with it a diversity of interpretation. I agree that carbon sesquioxide is much the same wherever it is found; but once made into glass it speaks in a local tongue.

As an editor who regularly rejects excellent papers because they are not addressed to an international readership, I know that quality and international appeal are not equivalent. While some general comment of world interest might prove ephemeral (these editorials for instance), some local excavations will survive and continue to influence the new written history of a country for hundreds of years. Such excavations are the stuff of our subject but they take a lot of time and energy to accomplish and even more time and energy to analyse. Not exactly good for the four year period of an RAE, and in consequence not good for the research councils. The idea that a piece of research might be hit and miss, takes 10 years to do and another 25 to come to fruition understandably strikes fear into the heart of every grant manager. But they forget that the resulting report will be read and referred to for several centuries. Perhaps the relative value of research needs some research itself – at least in archaeology.

🏰 Edinburgh archaeology, home of the Abercromby Chair in Prehistory, did not feature in the RAE; it was assessed in classics, from which we can assume that it no longer considers itself to have an archaeology department. That is a decision for its governing body of course, but the Abercromby Chair should not be put in an attic. It is part of our heritage. Since the problem seems to be that the chair is insufficiently endowed, might I suggest that they put it up for auction? Another university, enriched by cash and/or a more positive attitude to the subject, might wish to fill it and inherit the kudos that goes with it. This is in accordance with the spirit of the age. If you have no use for something yourself, sell it to someone who has. Perhaps not on eBay – we wouldn't want it to fall into the hands of terrorists (or historians).

🏰 Matthew Johnson promised us a rebirth of pluralist archaeological theory at Southampton's TAG (*Editorial*, September 2008) and he had some success: there was



*Theorists reminisce: (left to right) Duncan Brown, Clive Gamble, Colin Renfrew, Tim Champion, Andrew Fleming, Tim Darvill (leaving?) and Richard Bradley (consulting watch) at TAG 08, Southampton (photograph courtesy of Margarita Díaz-Andreu).*

certainly a lot of looking back. The plenary on Monday took its theme from the Parisian revolution of 1968 and the high point on Tuesday was a session of oral history about TAG's first 30 years. Randall McGuire was there to remind us that the real revolution in archaeology – the processual venture – had been every bit as significant as the student rebellion on the streets of Paris, but by the next day we had mostly forgotten about that. At Pamela Jane Smith's oral history session, seven prominent players shared their sepia-tinted images of the birth and childhood of TAG, largely seen as the home-grown progeny of Sheffield and Southampton. The memories of Les Sept appeared to consist of good parties (some so good no-one could remember much about them) and people who lost their tempers over some theoretical point or other. We were shown a short clip of Binford in action in 1992, but the general mood was one of warriors at their pints. Like most conversations in the pub this was oral history without any context. We were not reminded that Binford's *A consideration of archaeological research design* was published in 1964, 15 years before the first TAG convened, and other notable absentees from the discourse were Lévi-Strauss (whose 100<sup>th</sup> birthday it was), Braudel, Derrida and Berger – even though these anthropologists, historians, art historians and literary critics had been among archaeology's more powerful trend-setters.

TAG has a tendency to chase hares, and hares, I would remind you, run in circles. Post-modernists would approve, since circularity is their thing; the most flavoursome circles being those termed hermeneutic, the currently popular term for 'interpretive'. One might reflect that this word derives from Hermes, messenger of the Gods, who assisted the Fates in the composition of the alphabet and invented astronomy and weights and measures. Hermes is credited with many personal attributes, including eloquence and theft, but clarity is not one of them. According to Robert Graves, when Hermes was given the job of stimulating the human imagination, the following conversation took place on Mount Olympus: Hermes said to Zeus: '*make me your herald and I will never tell lies, though I cannot promise always to tell the truth*'. And Zeus replies: '*that would not be expected of you*'.<sup>2</sup>

☞ The prize for the silliest film of 2008 in a tough field (it included *Bonekickers*) was in the event easily won by *10 000 BC*, a complex fantasy in which mammoths and savages were rounded up in Siberia by horse-riding warriors with metal weapons and taken through mountain, steppe and jungle, menaced by sabre-toothed tigers and giant turkeys, in order to build the pyramids of the Egyptian Old Kingdom. Ethnic peoples were portrayed as overdressed, spear-waving coloured folk wearing face-packs who were persuaded to attack a desert-dwelling demi-god by a platitude-spouting Hollywood white man.

Even if themselves deprived of elementary schooling, the film-makers could have sought help from dozens of archaeologists, some living in California, who would have provided them with a better idea about life in 10 000 BC (and probably a better plot, better actors, a better script and better music as well). *Independence Day* (same director) was a great film, and not just because it had a good story and Will Smith, but because it is legitimate to fantasise about something we know nothing about – i.e. tentacled aliens attacking the earth in airborne battlecruisers and wanting to eat all its people. While we don't know everything about the Early Holocene, we know a lot more than this. The past may be elusive but it was not a dream world where anything was possible, as fluffy and limitless as the future. The world accepts that it is wrong to deny major historical events. Prehistoric people cannot sue for misrepresentation and defamation, but there must be some way that filmgoers can be protected from too much nonsense. Perhaps an additional censor's caveat would be in order: '*contains crudity, violence to reality and scenes offensive to prehistorians*'.

☞ Readers for whom the recession and the drubbing of the past are proving too much are invited to turn to pages 145-56 of this issue, where they will find Eun-Joo Lee's account of the tomb of a medieval Korean and the letters that were buried with him; perhaps the saddest, sweetest excavation report we've ever published.

Martin Carver  
York, 1 March 2009

<sup>2</sup> Robert Graves *The Greek myths* Volume 1 (Penguin, 1960: 65).