
In this Issue.....

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With this issue, *CAJ* ventures off into new territory! Issue 17.1 is full of our customary exciting mixture of archaeological research and theoretical debate, with articles covering everything from neurological discussion of 'Did Meditating Make us Human?' to social and ritual identities in Mesopotamia. We are also proud to present Terrell & Schechter's hefty reinterpretation of Lapita pottery which will be sure to provoke debate; and a critical discussion — and spirited defence — of Peter Bellwood's bold and award-winning book on agricultural dispersals, *First Farmers*.

But features like this are familiar to our readers, and need no particular spotlight. It is forays into two new directions which occasion this brief word of introduction.

Prehistoric histories

For the first time we are publishing a special supplementary issue, which will come out simultaneously with this issue. This is *Histories of the Dead: Building Chronologies for Five Southern British Long Barrows*, edited by Alasdair Whittle and Alex Bayliss and published here in collaboration with English Heritage. As Whittle modestly fails to explain in his short note in this issue which summarizes the work (pp. 21–8), this represents the culmination of a remarkable project. Radiocarbon dating has been a familiar archaeological tool for many years, and many of us assume that we know more or less what we can learn from it. But as Whittle and his collaborators demonstrate, when radiocarbon dating is combined with detailed contextual information and Bayesian calibration methods, the result can be a quantum leap in our ability to see fine-grained sequence. In this case study, the best that we could formerly do in scientifically dating of five of the classic Neolithic long barrows of southern England was to place them somewhere in the early to mid fourth millennium BC. With Bayesian calibration of carefully contextualized dates, suddenly archaeologists can discuss monument construction and use

almost at the decade-to-decade level. Remarkably, we can now see that many 'timeless' monuments, for the last century the archaeological symbol of all that was Neolithic, were constructed very rapidly early in the Neolithic, used for surprisingly short durations of a generation or two, and then abandoned.

So far, so good — for Neolithic specialists. But there are really two reasons why this is important enough to the general archaeological reader, we hope, to merit full-length publication as a *CAJ* special supplementary issue. One is that how closely we can track temporal scale underwrites what kind of human narratives we can construct about the past. Thanks to this redating, we can now see the histories of monuments not as century-long blurs but with at least generational precision — a step towards telling 'prehistoric histories', in Whittle's evocative phrase. The other reason is that this is a new and (it must be admitted) fairly technical approach which has great potential to be applied to classical archaeological problems around the globe. Hence we think archaeologists considering using it around the globe will find a full-length, detailed account of the flagship project worthwhile.

Research art?

While *CAJ* has published work *about* art for many years, this is the first time we have published art itself! At the heart of Andrew Cochrane and Ian Russell's work 'Visualizing Archaeology: a Manifesto' (pp. 3–19 below) are four original visual compositions which explore archaeological themes. These pieces are best left for the reader's pleasure rather than described here — indeed, part of the point Cochrane and Russell make is that some archaeological themes may be best explored non-verbally and visually. But they do mount a challenge to the tacitly asserted monopoly which conventional illustration and text hold over the archaeological imagination. Cochrane and Russell's writing is openly polemical, far more so than our articles normally are. Many readers will

take issue with its claim that archaeological research involves not establishing some approximation of truth but rather the 'fluid expressions of modern beliefs in temporalities and human agencies', and with their call for an alternative visual discourse of 'archaeological expressionism'.

But, whether one agrees with their answer or not, the question they pose is an important and provoking one. In recent years, researchers across the theoretical spectrum, from Colin Renfrew to Michael Shanks, have spotlighted the potential of art to explore archaeological themes. Art allows us to explore not only the characteristics of what we are seeing, but the qualities and construction of our own vision. Cochrane and Russell use art reflexively, to show how (in their view) archaeological representations can never be 'original' or 'true', but rather are assembled by the act

of seeing from a collage of culturally dominant representations. The meta-point, too, is that art can and should supply a critical tool for exploring our ideas and our capacities to think them, and for exploring the relationship between the archaeological viewer and the archaeological object.

Is this so? Must this form of 'research art' necessarily be expressionist or surrealist, rather than, say, Baroque or impressionist? And can we turn the art-mediated gaze to use such representations as a means of exploring thematic aspects of the past as well as of our understanding of it? These lead back to central issues of archaeological theory. The landscape we are travelling through here will be a familiar one to many *CAJ* readers, even if the vehicle of discussion may be novel – and the ultimate destination contentious or unknown.