

# EDITORIAL

☞ Is it time we did something about creationism? Is it an archaeological concern? The main contenders are currently locked in a debate for and against Darwinism – the theory that animal species evolved, including humans, is opposed by the theory that they didn't: a presumably intelligent God designed everything, and not very long ago. Thus the defenders of science have been the biologists and the battlefield has been the school curricula in the USA where Christian fundamentalists have championed intelligent design as an alternative to evolution<sup>1</sup>. American biblical Protestants, who have long waved the banner, are now to be joined by Catholic Europeans. In 2005, Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, a confidant of Pope Benedict, attacked neo-Darwinist theories in what seemed to be a move to ally the Catholic church with 'intelligent design'<sup>2</sup>. In England, 59 out of 89 schools accepted as 'a useful classroom resource' creationist teaching packs sent to them by the group *Truth in Science*<sup>3</sup>. And in November 2006 the creationist cause acquired a new ally when the Turkish Muslim intellectual Harun Yahya launched his *Atlas de la Création*. This 770 page lavishly illustrated tome (promised as the first of seven) used 'living fossils' to prove that God directly created the world with all its species and blamed Darwin for everything from Nazism to terrorism. In February this year, to the evident irritation of their education ministry and the outrage of the press, copies of the *Atlas* were mailed to thousands of French schools.

Yahya has a gratifyingly post-modern view of archaeology; it shows that nothing much has changed and life on the Savannah was (depressingly) similar to everywhere else today: "In the supposed period described by evolutionists as the Stone Age, people worshipped, listened to the message preached by the envoys sent to them, constructed buildings, cooked food in their kitchens, chatted with their families, visited their neighbours, had tailors sew clothes for them, were treated by doctors, took an interest in music, painted, made statues and in short lived perfectly normal lives. As the archaeological findings show, there have been changes in technology and accumulated knowledge over the course of history, but human beings have always lived as human beings"<sup>4</sup>. In the face of such stuff, most archaeologists would no doubt prefer to maintain a withering silence, but there are reasons why silence might not be sensible for ever. Here is Christopher O'Brien, a Forest Archaeologist in northern California, bravely setting out our stall<sup>5</sup>: Just like other disciplines, he says, "archaeology is being used and abused by creationists of all stripes. It's time to start pointing out the falsehoods. . .". First we must champion our own dating methods: "because many of us deal in time scales measured in millions of years, archaeologists must also fight the same inane arguments against the efficacy of radiometric dating methods as any palaeontologist". Then we must not allow the numerous cohort of amateur archaeologists to try and prove the Bible was right after five minutes working as a volunteer on an excavation.

<sup>1</sup> see, for example, The Evolution Controversy in our schools at *National Academy of Sciences website* [www.nasonline.org](http://www.nasonline.org); and Answers in Genesis, 'upholding the authority of the Bible from the very first verse' at [www.answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org).

<sup>2</sup> Reuters 26 March 07.

<sup>3</sup> Guardian 27 Nov 06.

<sup>4</sup> Harun Yahya A Historical Lie: the Stone Age.

<sup>5</sup> see weblog: Northstate Science. Described as "A source of reason and logic in a world increasingly hostile to both".



"RIGHT! USING THE STONE AXE SMASH OPEN YOUR CREATIONIST TEACHING PACK AT PAGE...."

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The archaeological reality of Jericho, he reminds us, no more "proves the Bible" than the archaeological reality of Troy "proves the *Iliad*". "In the context of archaeology, the Bible is simply another historical manuscript (one of thousands throughout the world and across time) that may or may not be useful for aiding interpretation of the archaeological record". Amen to that. And as a final abuse of archaeological reasoning, creationists seem to think there is an analogy to be drawn between an archaeologist's recognition of intelligent design in artefacts, with their own identification of intelligent design in biological systems.

In other words, O'Brien shows that far from countering the benighted influence of creationism, we are providing it with ammunition. For the sake of our children, archaeologists must confront it, but confrontation of the tis-tisn't kind won't be enough on its own. To take the dating issue: the supposed moment the world was created has moved back from Archbishop Ussher (4004 BC, worked out from the Bible) to an origin about 10 000 years ago. Yahya is even happy to cite a 40 000 year old flute as proof that man did not evolve from something more primitive (primitive persons can't play flutes). Radiometric dating may even be recruited to the creationist cause, proving that man is actually eternal and Noah's flood could soon reappear as the explanation of the Pleistocene. And what would creationists say if they knew that we no longer believed in evolution as an explanation either – at least not for handaxes or human societies. No, the real case against creationism is that it is unimaginative, small-minded and dull. Contrast it with archaeology's view: the diversity and experimentation of thousands of species and peoples over millions of years on a tiny planet, in a minor solar system, in a colossal universe. That's my sort of god: thinks big, likes ideas, favours processes.



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Three interesting 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries so far this year, the first being that of the journal *Russian Archaeology*, or *Soviet Archaeology* as it used to be called. Nikolai Makarov, Director of the Institute of Archaeology, and Leonid Belyaev, the journal's editor, were the inspiring hosts for the celebrations at the Academy of Science in Moscow (1-2 March 2007) where numerous toasts were drunk. A.P. Derevanko, secretary of the Academy, reminded everyone that the journal's experience – an intellectual rollercoaster by any standards – was an epitome of the history of science. Under Belyaev's editorship, *RA* has moved beyond the presentation of results, and is addressing matters of politics and archaeology, CRM, the bad influence of the mass media and the teaching of intelligent design in schools. *RA* comes out four times a year, 192 pages at a time and is one of 158 journals published by the Academy. The attractively produced *Vestnik* (herald), edited by V. I. Vasilyev, is the popular magazine, and the two work in partnership. There was no defluffing of the post-modern navel here, just red-blooded archaeological exploration from the Bering Sea to the Caucasus, from Mongolia to the Baltic, featuring fabulous Scythian burials under kurgans in Siberia, and 3m deep stratification at Russo-Scandinavian Gorodische.

Your editor had the task of anticipating western trends in academic publishing: pleading for the retention of peer-review, editorial responsibility and reader-power in a world of search engines, e-repositories, open access and big business academic publishing. *Antiquity* is looked on as something of a curiosity in both east and west: commercially viable but unsubsidised and completely independent of governments, fellowships or large publishers,

So what was the Stone Age really like? Presumably we can expect an up-to-date perception from cutting-edge French advertisers – or can we? Our correspondent Nathan Schlanger reports a new vandal-calming campaign in the Paris métro, spearheaded by the clean-living hero *homo modernus*. The antithesis of this tidy person, who never leaves his mammoth parked in a bus lane or rips up seats with a bifacial hand-axe, is presumably *homo prehistoricus*, who as well as being nasty, brutish and short (like his life) is dysfunctional in every particular. Our indignant correspondent (who has already belaboured *Libération* on behalf of us all) comments: “besides being quite unwarranted, such recourse to pseudo-prehistoric atavisms to account for uncivil behaviour only disguises their actual causes, which must lie in the modern and civilised rat-race of contemporary society”.

peer-reviewed but also using its readers as the ultimate arbiters of good research. We look forward to publishing new work from this great long-lived continent, while helping *Rossiskaya Archeologia* find new readers.

🏰 *Medieval Archaeology*, the journal and society, is also fifty this year and celebrating itself at a number of conferences. The first at Oxford has already happened, and among the pious or nostalgic affections expressed for the old or deceased, one or two unexpected trends were detectable. First, the centre of intellectual gravity has shifted from the early period (AD 400-1000) to the later (AD 1000-1600). Second, historical explanation sits in the chair, while archaeological theory occupies the foot-stool; and lastly, the focus of today's *Medieval Archaeology* member is Britain, and possibly Ireland, and not Europe as we had once anticipated. Maybe these things are connected. There is certainly no such thing as an early medieval archaeology which happens only in 'Britain', and the protohistoric period is driven by archaeological not historical principles. I intend no criticism here, but look forward to receiving outraged, preferably publishable, contestations of the Society's real agenda.

🏰 Our last birthday is that of the European Union, which has been together since 1957. Interestingly, the cultural dimension of European integration was only recognised for the first time in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, which spelt out its aims: "Language, literature, performing arts, visual arts, architecture, crafts, the cinema and broadcasting are all part of Europe's cultural diversity. Although belonging to a specific country or region, they represent part of Europe's common cultural heritage. The aim of the European Union is double: to preserve and support this diversity and to help make it accessible to others". Although not actually listed, archaeology belongs here, and is an acknowledged cultural player. The EU now has a European Archaeological Council (President: Adrian Olivier) that exists to harmonise the working of the various state agencies, and a five year plan, which itself exhibits a fine diversity: a campaign to increase public awareness of the Bronze Age, a network of ancient places of public performance (entertainment rather than politics, as in the Verona amphitheatre), the promotion of core data standards for the recording of archaeological sites and monuments and an examination of the situation in urban archaeology.

There are also *flagship programmes* pitched at implementing the mission: the establishment of a European cultural area, promoting a knowledge of European history, the development of heritage sites and collections and the stimulation of intercultural dialogue and social integration. The first of these programmes ran from 2000 to 2006 with a budget of €236M, and the second is to start this year and run to 2013 with a budget of about €400M. These are opportunities which must not be missed. Archaeology has every chance here of having its voice heard and making arresting contributions.

🏰 Congratulations to our Prize-winners for contributions to the journal in 2006: The *Antiquity Prize* for best article was awarded to Geoffrey King (Laboratoire Tectonique, Institut Physique du Globe, Paris) and Geoffrey Bailey (University of York) for 'Tectonics and human evolution' (80: 265-286). The *Ben Cullen Prize* for best article by a novice was won by Siyakha Mguni (Rock Art Research Unit, Witwatersrand University) for 'King's Monuments: identifying "formlings" in southern African San rock paintings' (80: 583-598).

Martin Carver  
York, 1 June 2007

*Martin Carver*



*These two stunning summer and winter aerial photographs of the site of Por-Bazhin, on the island of Tere-Khol in the lake of the same name in the Republic of Tuva in the Altai region of the Russian Federation near the Russian-Mongolian border, were sent to us by Irina Arzhantseva (Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia; email: iaa@gol.ru). The site, a fortress – possibly temple or palace complex – is ascribed to the Uyghur people and thought to date to the eighth-ninth century AD. An archaeological expedition, with input from the universities of Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Kazan, Krasnoyarsk and Kyzyl, is to take place there in summer 2007, supported by Sergei Shoigu, federal minister for Emergencies and a native Tuvan. For further information see Tuva-online (<http://en.tuvaonline.ru/2007/04/01/por-bazhyn.html>).*



*Picrolite cruciform figurine with unusual body ornament, from University of Edinburgh excavations at Souskiou-Laona Cyprus, c. 3000 BC. Ht. 7.4 cm. The picrolite figurine, from Tomb 207 (SL 433), lay on bedrock at the base of a deep shaft beneath the lower legs and feet bones of an articulated individual. There were three of these, together with a bone stack supporting crania from four other individuals, alongside many other objects. Photograph Edgar Peltenburg (Email: e.peltenburg@ed.ac.uk).*