

EDITORIAL

☞ At 12.30 pm on Saturday 12 June 2004, the Trustees and Directors of *Antiquity* took the momentous decision to go digital – in other words to create an on-line version of the journal and all its previous issues. So many other periodicals have already slipped blithely into electronic publishing that readers may feel that a slow hand-clap is in order. However, ours is a very broad and varied constituency and much thinking has been devoted to the question of how to serve these diverse interests well. For many of us the way we read archaeology – or anything else – is closely related to the way we see life on earth and our place in it – a fundamental, even a metaphysical matter, not at all to be satisfied by throwaway aphorisms such as “inevitable technology”, “improved cost-benefits” or “rapid dissemination”. A technology which cannot be read in strong sunlight, expires if kept away too long from an electronic socket and becomes unreadable if you spill coffee on it is, one hopes, not inevitable. There is no contest with a *book* which doesn't mind rain and sand, is still legible after being run over and can be read in the bath without killing you. The rapid dissemination of information, as opposed to its appreciation, may be the problem rather than the solution. And as for cost-benefit, it is important that the cost shall not accrue exclusively to the reader and the benefit to the publisher.

With these things in mind, we have devised the following scheme, and I hope readers will permit me to take a few lines to describe it. The first thing to say is that the printed journal will go on being delivered in printed form so long as there is any demand for it. Those who like the printed journal shall continue to get it, regularly and pleasurably we hope. So what will the on-line journal look like and how will one read it? With one exception, it will resemble the printed journal in every particular, and that exception is the inclusion, in the on-line journal only, of certain tables and lists that



Antiquity's new search facility will allow you to unearth such ancient gems as this, from Volume 6, 1932.

support published articles. Readers will be aware that we have already been doing this over the last year, and it has been well received – or at least courteously tolerated – by authors. Subscribers to the on-line journal will have a user code and nice clear instructions to go with it which will provide them with access from *Antiquity's* website.

What then of the back-numbers? *Antiquity's* 77 years of publishing world archaeology has created a unique and priceless archive, containing not only discoveries and theories but commentary on its times and archaeology's place in them. For this reason we have decided to create a comprehensive search facility which can find not only authors and titles, but words and phrases used on any page, whether in articles, notes, reviews, advertisements or editorials. It is intended as an instrument with which to research both archaeology and archaeology's own history. A "premium" subscription gives access to all the back-numbers; but non-subscribers can also find and download particular articles through a "pay-to-view" option on our website.

Readers will find the options and rates for 2005 at the end of this volume. We hope very much that you will want to take up one or other of the options and encourage your colleagues and institutions to do likewise.

 Two hundred delegates from fifteen countries gathered in Lund, Sweden, in June to discuss the surprising subject of Old Norse religion. Their enthusiasm for the arcane was perhaps a measure of the current archaeological *zeitgeist*. Although not all of the 102 speakers were concerned with material culture, a great many were, and applied themselves with gusto to the interpretation of hanging rituals and the social role of the stuffed horse's penis. The modern European prehistorian is no bashful statistician with Christopher Hawkes' "Ladder of Inference" framed on the office wall. Finding past patterns and trends and explaining them in terms of changing subsistence and social control is yesterday's task. Now with Harry Potter we can look the occult in the eye and talk it into our front room, not just finding what people might have believed, but deciding it might be rather interesting to believe it too. Rock art naturally figured prominently, its ships carrying the sun and carrying the dead away to the metaphorical deep. Hoards were found to have been buried as an act of devotional curation – perhaps on the eve of a Christian conversion. Smelting iron called on a lengthy ritual coition from the puffing male smith and female furnace who were rewarded with an infant bloom. In brief, prehistoric people, once considered rational negotiators with nature, turn out to be preoccupied with sex, ecstasy and fatuous beliefs, just like us.

However, this impression masks the deeper achievement of the unusual research project that this conference was intended to celebrate. "Old Norse Religion in Long Term Perspective" has been based at the University of Lund under the leadership of Anders Andrén, (who is to be the new Professor of Archaeology at Stockholm). Of the wealth of new thinking that this project has unleashed, three matters will certainly interest *Antiquity* readers. First, the matching of the rich archaeology to the suggestive (but later) texts has led researchers to winkle out spiritual activities at all sites – not just those hitherto labelled as ritual. Worship and magic were everywhere, it seems. Then the team has shown that the development of "Norse" culture was not something done in isolation and darkness at the edge of a frozen forest – but in the full glare of Roman Europe. Here, as elsewhere, the designers of many "Norse" specialities – runes, helmets and even the hillforts – have been found to have dangled their fingers in the Roman trifle. Scandinavians, sometimes admired as "pure" pagans, were just as eclectic as

Anglo-Saxons. This new vision of a composite pluralist past is having an effect on the way Scandinavia sees itself in modern Europe – this being not the least of archaeology’s gifts to modern politics.

The other achievement is perhaps the most famous – namely the discovery and excavation over the last 15 years of a series of fabulous protohistoric sites. At Gudme, Sorte Mulde, and Uppåkra, to name just three, Scandinavian archaeologists have revealed a new repertoire of pre-Christian spiritual performance: giant timber halls, tall timber temples and large deposits of tiny gold plaques featuring men and women kissing each other. These sites have changed the later prehistory of Europe. Like Sutton Hoo it is now hard to remember the time when we didn’t have these things, and to recall the simple views of the benighted pre-Christians we were then able to entertain.

☞ Coming soon to a cinema near you, the next epic blockbuster which is about Arthur of Britain. To most of us, says Arthurian John Matthews who is advising the project, “*Arthur is either misty folklore or a rollicking good yarn set in the Middle Ages.*” But shunning knights rescuing damsels in many-towered Camelot, the new film “*paints a savage and realistic picture... nearer to historical truth than any film before*”. For those who missed the Daily Mail’s feature on 3 July, here is an abbreviated synopsis. Arthur is a Roman officer, Lucius Artorius Castus, with a British mother, who leads a group of heroes, the Knights of the Round Table (including Lancelot and Bors) who come from a far off land called Sarmatia, roughly between the Black Sea and Caspian Sea (everyone all right so far?). They fight against the Woads, cunning and ferocious adversaries from the north of Hadrian’s Wall, led by Merlin, a potently mysterious shaman. Arthur and his men are awaiting discharge papers, but a messenger turns up with ‘one last job’ for Arthur and the knights... John Matthews sees links between Hadrian’s Wall forts Camboglanna and Avalanna and Camelot and Avalon (geddit?) and has discovered a poem “*dating to within 200 years of Arthur’s time*”. “*I still remember the excitement I felt as I read it*” he says, as well he might. I look forward to hearing the verdicts of Leslie Alcock, Charles Thomas and Christopher Snyder on “New Arthur” as portrayed in book and film.

The message of the current wave of movies appears to be that people who give offence deserve to be conquered, and conquest (if that’s your thing) can be most easily achieved by a combination of a single muscle-bound psychopath and assorted magic. The problem with films is that



Bill Tidy

“ONE LAST JOB, LADS. THE WALL NEEDS POINTING !!”

they are so persuasive. Watching *Troy* the other day with some of my children I was bowled over, not so much by the sword play (it's good, though) as the reconstructed Greek ship bobbing beneath a jagged rock on a green Ionian sea, and then, through the wizardry of digital imaging, the camera lifting from one ship to another, to three, ten, a hundred, each with a different crew doing different things on board, until there were a thousand ships in view, ploughing north, all as real as the face that launched them. What chance do TV documentaries have against such technology? Our world is not more boring than theirs; on the contrary it is more exciting because it is busy with more varied and more colourful characters, burdened by ambiguous morals and living lives that are deeper and messier than one mistake with a spear or one blood-spattered incident would express. Maybe our TV producers should not try to compete but get back to programmes which feature humans thinking about humans on a human scale: *Animal, Vegetable and Mineral*, with theory ...

☞ One of our leading theorists had a splendid retirement party on 2 July given by his department and attended by friends and colleagues from all over the world. Colin Renfrew was justly feted with gratitude and affection and presented with a boxed set of three *festschriften* (on *explaining social change, material engagement* and *traces of ancestry*). They were delivered with music, an uplifting blues composed by Chris Evans and Tim Murray and sung by Dora Kemp with Kristian Kristiansen improvising at the piano. This song was the first I've come across which had a footnote and contained the memorable lines:

"Thought I was on easy street, but the brown book¹ came out of nowhere
Processual versus post-processual –
It was Hodder and Tilley – chilly everywhere"
Disney blues ...

Some of Professor Renfrew's other interests were acknowledged by the gift from the department of a 45 rpm Bill Hayley *Rock around the Clock* (1956) and the equally enduring Stukeley's *Stonehenge. A Temple Restored* (1740). His speech of thanks was characteristically fluent, and did not disguise his long love affair with archaeology. Then it was off to receive two honorary degrees (from Liverpool and Edinburgh). My curmudgeonly colleague Dr Humphrey Harumphrey is unimpressed by this, and was heard to mutter testily, "*to him who has, much shall be given*". We're used to this kind of thing from Humphrey. What Colin Renfrew has done and continues to do is to make our subject matter beyond its natural borders. One cannot reward that too highly.

Martin Carver
York, 1 September 2004

1 I Hodder (ed) (1992) *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press