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# **E**DITORIAL

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How often in Europe does a brand-new university department of archaeology appear? This year the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, established just such a department under the headship of Professor Neil Price, previously at Uppsala and Oslo, Norway. The avowed focus of the Aberdeen Department is on 'The North' – not just northern Europe, but also the whole humanly occupied Arctic circumpolar zone, broadly interpreted. This is a bold initiative, the development of which will be followed with much interest.

This news from Aberdeen comes to mind partly because one of the authors in the current issue – Doug Price, an old friend of the EAA (and no relation to Neil Price!) – has become attached to that Department as adjunct Professor of Archaeological Science. Partly also because it struck a chord when recently I attended a conference in Durham, England, organized by EAA Executive Board member Margarita Díaz-Andreu. This conference celebrated the life and work of Gordon Childe 50 years on from his death, and the breadth of geographic ambition espoused in Aberdeen has distinct echoes of Childe's broad pan-European vision when Abercromby Professor of European Prehistory at Edinburgh University.

The Childe conference demonstrated clearly that there is still much new light to be shone on Childe's career and also much of contemporary relevance to be gained from a nuanced historical perspective on his writing and the intellectual milieu in which he was situated. A further link is provided by the fact that another one of this issue's authors, John Chapman (himself a former distinguished editor of this journal) was one of the speakers at the Childe conference. And indeed, both of the papers by Chapman and colleagues and by Price and colleagues in this issue tackle topics which relate directly to those of central concern to Childe in his quest to understand social evolution in prehistoric Europe.

Excavations at the Varna cemetery in Bulgaria have provided a fabulously rich data set which will doubtless continue to be a focus of archaeological attention from many angles for decades to come. Here Chapman and colleagues present a

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series of radiocarbon dates which start to unravel the true chronological position of this cemetery and situate it more precisely in its cultural context, but they are also concerned to address questions of changing social and individual identity in the Climax Copper Age.

Radiocarbon dating had of course hardly impacted on Childe's understanding of what happened in history, since its application was still in its infancy by the time of his death in 1957. Another scientific technique Childe could hardly have dreamt of in the context of studying prehistoric Europe is that of strontium isotope analysis. Price and his colleagues are at the forefront of applying and interpreting the results of this technique, as shown here to advantage in their study of the Neolithic burials at Talheim, Germany (cf Bentley 2007; and for some cautionary comments on using isotope analyses see Bickle and Hoffmann 2007). Everything about these Talheim burials is of considerable interest, but the focus in this paper is on what can be gathered about the place of origin of the Neolithic individuals involved, with its implications for our appreciation of Linearbandkeramik society.

And what would Childe have made of the extraordinary explosion of discoveries of Neolithic house sites in Ireland? Jessica Smyth brings us up to date with an overview of the 70 structures now known (and probably more have been discovered since going to press!). Their discovery is a fascinating phenomenon for contemporary archaeology, not only in terms of the enhancement it brings to Neolithic studies in Europe but also because of what it betokens of the developments in current field archaeology which underlie the discoveries. Childe would certainly have been appreciative of the efforts in this paper to explore the social function of these Irish buildings.

The two other papers in this issue take us beyond the sphere of Gordon Childe's work. It is not often that the *EJA* features numismatic matters, yet we are all aware that coins are and always have been central to the historical archaeological project. Perhaps more so than in the case of other specialist sub-disciplines, however, numismatists have long been publishing in their own bespoke journals, with papers written to a certain extent in a *sui generis* language. It is encouraging, therefore, to have Douglas Newton's accessible paper which addresses a fundamental concern about one of the ways in which coin data from the past can be interpreted, using in this instance the analogy of an empirical study of modern coin loss.

Finally, Per Holck provides a fascinating account of the early investigations of the famous Oseberg ship burial and in particular the story of the human remains it contained. In the event this has proved an unexpectedly timely and propitious paper, since the hoped-for fieldwork did indeed begin in 2007 and we look forward to seeing if the prospects for further scientific examination as suggested here come to fruition.

The reviews section of this journal goes from strength to strength, and expands in this issue to include reviews of an exhibition and a journal. The subjects of the archaeological literature covered by the reviews may sometimes seem impossibly wide – geographically, chronologically and intellectually – but all can be read with profit. No single reader would want (or be able) to read all the actual books under discussion, but the views expressed by the reviewers in evaluating them are

consistently informative, challenging and entertaining in ways that transcend the specialist subject-matter.

To conclude, readers will notice that – for the first time since the *EJA* appeared in April 1998 – this is a combined double issue of the journal. There are two reasons for this. Firstly it is part of the continuing effort to bring the date of issue of the journal back in line with its cover date. Secondly it accords with recently reviewed proposals of the EAA Boards to have the flexibility of publishing combinations of two or even three issues of the journal to accommodate contributions relating to particular themes or conference sessions. The current issue is therefore by way of an experiment in this direction and I would encourage readers to feed back any views they may have via the EAA weblog (<http://eja.e-e-a.org/>).

## REFERENCES

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