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Frontispiece 1. A scuba diver (Tyler Schultz) samples an ancient peat bog on the Alpena-Amberley Ridge at the bottom of Lake Huron, in the Great Lakes, USA. For 1500 years, the ridge acted as a causeway across Lake Huron before being submerged by glacial meltwaters, isostatic rebound and climatic shifts. The cold, fresh waters of the lake offer excellent preservation conditions for macrobotanical remains, pollen and environmental DNA that provide high-resolution data for palaeoenvironmental reconstruction. Investigations of the ridge directed by John O'Shea and Ashley Lemke of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee have yielded evidence for early Holocene hunting sites and artefacts. For more on submerged-landscape archaeology, see Lemke in press. Anthropological archaeology underwater. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Photograph © John O'Shea.*

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Frontispiece 2. Aerial view of enclosure ditches revealed during excavation over the winter of 2023–2024 in advance of gravel quarrying at Marliens, around 20km east of Dijon, Côte-d'Or, north-eastern France. Investigations extended across 60 000 m^2 yielding a range of features dating from the Neolithic to the early Iron Age. The three interlocking enclosures comprise a central circular space, 11m in diameter, with horseshoe-shaped enclosures to the north and south; stratigraphically, the ditches are contemporaneous. The arrangement of the ditches has no clear precedent. Flint artefacts recovered from the ditch fills date stylistically to the Neolithic period; radiocarbon dating is currently underway to refine the chronology. Nearby, the same project documented evidence of Bronze and Early Iron Age burials. © Jérôme Berthet, Inrap.

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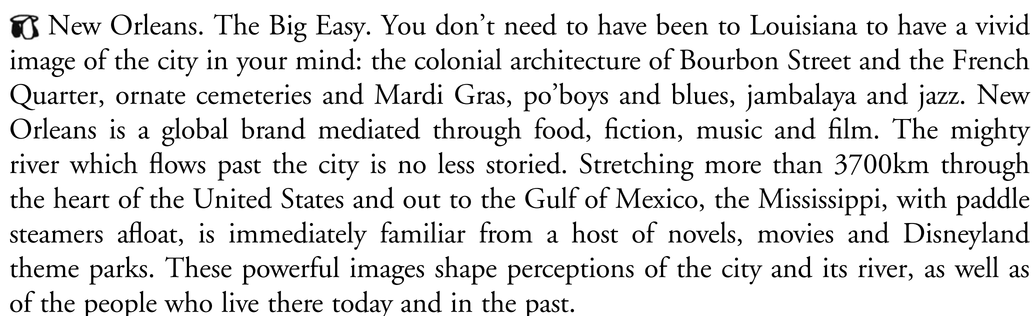
EDITORIAL



Deconstructed gumbo

New Orleans. The Big Easy. You don't need to have been to Louisiana to have a vivid image of the city in your mind: the colonial architecture of Bourbon Street and the French Quarter, ornate cemeteries and Mardi Gras, po'boys and blues, jambalaya and jazz. New Orleans is a global brand mediated through food, fiction, music and film. The mighty river which flows past the city is no less storied. Stretching more than 3700km through the heart of the United States and out to the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi, with paddle steamers afloat, is immediately familiar from a host of novels, movies and Disneyland theme parks. These powerful images shape perceptions of the city and its river, as well as of the people who live there today and in the past.

In April this year, the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) annual meeting brought some of the *Antiquity* editorial team to the Deep South offering the opportunity to compare the stories of New Orleans and its river with the reality. In practice, this was most readily achieved through the medium of food, not least because one of the most frequent metaphors used to capture the city's unique identity is culinary—that delicious fusion of diverse ingredients, cooking styles and myth-making in a bowl: gumbo. The dish's individual elements can be traced to different cultures—Native American Chocktaw, French, Spanish and West African—but it is in the slow cooking together that the distinctive quality of the dish, the identity of the city, is created. It's a tasty and digestible metaphor, though arguably a little too palatable. An apolitical stew, perhaps, for not all the separate ingredients of New Orleans creole culture necessarily played a willing role in forging this colonial city's 300-year history.

The early success of New Orleans was based on its control of maritime and river trade—including the importation of enslaved labourers and the export of goods such as sugar and cotton produced on slave plantations along the Mississippi valley. Indeed, the association with slavery dates back to the city's birth: the first two ships carrying slaves from West Africa arrived in 1719, just a year after the city's foundation. Over the next century, New Orleans became the largest slave market in North America, with many tens of thousands of enslaved people bought and sold in its trading houses. Even after the transatlantic slave trade was outlawed in 1808, New Orleans continued as a hub for the US domestic slave market, reselling enslaved individuals from the cities of the East Coast upriver to the plantations of the Mississippi valley or along the coast to Texas.

Today, walking around New Orleans, the names of Napoleon, Lafitte and Jackson are as ubiquitous and celebrated as are gumbo and jambalaya on the menus of the city's restaurants.

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It's harder to spot much explicit recognition of the city's role in the slave trade—though this situation is beginning to change. As part of the city's tricentenary in 2018, historic markers or signs were erected to acknowledge the historical presence of enslaved people and the city's role in their trade. One marker on the riverside walk in front of Jackson Square where ships would once have docked recalls the eighteenth-century transatlantic Middle Passage; other markers around the city emphasise the domestic slave trade of the first half of the nineteenth century.

A house near New Orleans

☛ The topic of slavery was well covered in a significant number of presentations at the SAA meeting. One of a special series of Southeast archaeology sessions focused on 'New Orleans and its environs: historical archaeology and environmental precarity' exploring recent archaeological investigations in the city and surrounding region, many undertaken as part of recovery works following Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the Deepwater Horizon disaster (2010). Several papers emphasised bioarchaeological and palaeoenvironmental evidence for dietary and health inequalities in the colonial communities of the city and the plantations of the Lower Mississippi River Delta. Contributions to several other sessions examined recent archaeological work at plantation sites across the Southeast USA, the Caribbean and beyond, highlighting a research area of growing geographical range and diverse interpretative and social objectives[1] including work with descendant communities.[2] Many of these accounts seek to emphasise the oppressive control of slave owners while also articulating the agency, however constrained, of the enslaved. A new book on L'Hermitage Plantation in Maryland, for example, advances the notion of the 'nervous landscape'—a space where the slave owner's fear of his workforce and its potential for resistance motivated the brutal treatment of enslaved labourers.[3]

Such 'nervousness' surely also characterised the colonial landscape along the banks of the Mississippi west of New Orleans, a stretch of the river once known as Plantation Alley (and, more recently on account of some residents' poor health resulting from the industrialisation of the river's banks, Cancer Alley). Today, the handsome antebellum houses that once fronted the Mississippi are protected, and hidden, from the river by high levees. Also out of sight at many of these plantations—now converted into hotels and private houses—is the story of the people that laboured in the hot fields and over even hotter sugar kettles. At some of these properties, however, the history of slavery has been brought to the fore, including at Whitney Plantation where a long-term project has developed the historical estate

[1] For research on a sugar plantation site in São Tomé, see M.D. Cruz, L. Thomas & M.N. Ceita. 2023. Bitter legacy: archaeology of early sugar plantation and slavery in São Tomé. *Antiquity* 97: e30. https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2023.113

[2] Montgomery, L.M. & T.C. Fryer. 2023. The future of archaeology is (still) community collaboration. *Antiquity* 97: 795–809. https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2023.98

[3] Bailey, M.M. 2024. *Memory and power at L'Hermitage Plantation: heritage of a nervous landscape*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

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Figure 1. A slave cabin and sugar kettle at Whitney Plantation.

as a centre dedicated to the history of slavery, downplaying the display of the 'big house' to emphasise those elements of the estate that illustrate more directly the lives and labour of the enslaved (Figure 1).

Whitney Plantation was founded in 1752 by one of the many German immigrants who settled along this stretch of the river; in fact, so many settlers from that part of Europe arrived in the eighteenth century that the area became known as the German Coast. The estate originally produced indigo, subsequently converting to the more lucrative production of sugar around 1800. By the eve of the Civil War, in 1861, more than 100 enslaved labourers worked on the plantation. Following emancipation, the property passed through many hands but resident labourers, many descended from the enslaved workers of the pre-Civil War period, continued to live and work at the site until 1975. Today, a Wall of Honour commemorates those enslaved on Whitney Plantation, featuring their names and sometimes other precious snippets of biography preserved in the archives, such as age, place of origin or a particular skill.

As part of the development of the site as a centre for the study of slavery, the Senegalese scholar and director of research at Whitney, Ibrahima Seck, has investigated the history of the plantation, its owners and their enslaved workers emphasising, in particular, the latter's links back to West Africa.[4] Many of those who laboured in the cane fields at Whitney were transported via the Middle Passage from the Gulf of Guinea and the Bight of Biafra. More than 'property' or a source of labour, these individuals arrived with diverse cultural identities and forms of knowledge. Some, for example, brought with them the technical know-how needed for the cultivation of rice and the processing of indigo. It is also to West Africa that Seck looks to understand the everyday resistance strategies used by the enslaved workers of Louisiana, including foodways and storytelling.

Occasionally, however, resistance took more violent forms. In 1811, several hundred enslaved labourers were pushed to open rebellion. The German Coast uprising, the largest slave revolt in the American South, began with the killing of the son of a plantation owner a few kilometres downriver from Whitney. The armed insurgents then marched towards New Orleans with the aim of escaping by sea, gaining numbers and burning several plantations en route. Their progress was soon checked by local militia, however, leaving

[4] Seck, I. 2014. *Bouki fai gombo: a history of the slave community of Habitation Haydel (Whitney Plantation), Louisiana, 1750–1860*. New Orleans (LA): UNO Press.

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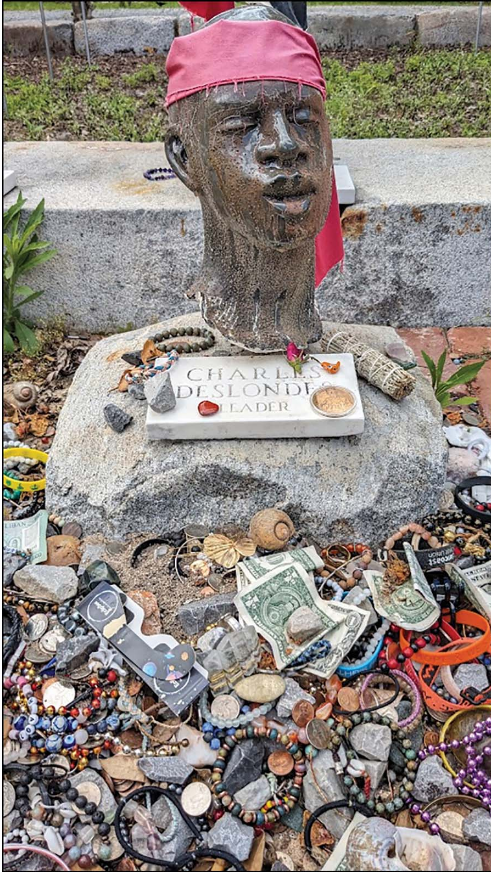

Figure 2. Offerings left at the memorial at Whitney Plantation to Charles Deslondes and the 1811 German Coast uprising.

dozens dead including one of the leaders of the insurrection—a young Creole slave named Charles Deslondes—who was brutally executed without trial.

Many other insurgents were captured, tried and condemned to death—to be shot and their heads displayed on poles, at the estates where they had been enslaved, to serve as a warning to others. The violent suppression of the revolt and the punishment of those involved speaks of the 'nervousness' of the plantation owners. It arguably also explains why the uprising has been occluded in the memory of American slavery. As Seck notes about the history of slavery more generally, there is a tension between the need to remember and the need to forget. How to negotiate that gap? Recently writing about the archaeology of the Middle Passage, Jane Webster observes the same tension, suggesting that: "for the saltwater captives who lived through it and remembered it, just as for their descendants who have successively re-lived and re-membered it, the Middle Passage has always existed in a liminal or third space of creativity—a space somewhere between the imperative to recall and the need to forget".[5] At Whitney, that liminal space of creativity is filled by a series of specially commissioned artworks including a memorial to Charles Deslondes and the 1811 German Coast uprising (Figure 2).[6]

A river runs through it

In the same way that many popular perceptions of New Orleans and the Mississippi are shaped by fictional narratives, so too is many people's understanding of slavery. Indeed, the two are often intertwined. More than any other writer, it was Mark Twain who established the river's reputation as a great highway running through the central United States

[5] Webster, J. 2023. *Materializing the Middle Passage: a historical archaeology of British slave shipping, 1680–1807*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 462.
[6] Seck 2014, p.115.

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connecting New Orleans with St Louis and the continental interior via his travel tales, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883). Similarly, his novels also strongly shaped, and continue to shape, understanding of slavery, including the 'Great American Novel' *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In the latter especially, Twain was critical of slavery and racism, though his literary legacy has been endlessly debated and reworked, sometimes deemed too political and hence sanitised into pastiche (à la Disneyland) and at other times dismissed as insufficiently radical. What then might Twain have made of a new novel that re-narrates *Huckleberry Finn* from the perspective of Huck's enslaved runaway companion Jim? In *James*, American writer and Professor of English Percival Everett gives us an insight into not only Jim's personal journey but also of the wider enslaved experience.[7] In this retelling, James is a well-read man, at one point conversing during a fever dream with Voltaire and later secretly thrilled to find a copy of Rousseau's *Discourse on inequality* in a stash of stolen goods. Similarly, James's use of dialect is not a sign of his lack of education or racial inferiority, but rather a strategy for dealing with white people. Echoing the tactics of resistance discussed in Scott's *Weapons of the weak*,[8] James and his enslaved companions switch between 'standard' English when conversing among themselves and dialect when in earshot of their 'owners', intentionally conforming to the stereotype put upon them in order both to assuage and exclude their masters. Everett's literary decolonisation parallels archaeology's ongoing work to diversify the voices who narrate the past, recognising that who speaks can be as important as what is said. It perhaps also hints at the importance of imagined narratives in addressing the silences in the archaeological record of this particular region—erased by hurricanes, floods and racism—and of colonial contexts more widely.[9]

Come together

Two millennia before Cahokia reached its cultural and political peak in the early second millennium AD as the largest pre-Columbian site north of Mexico, that claim was held by another site on the Mississippi: the Late Archaic site of Poverty Point in north-eastern Louisiana. Inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 2014, the complex of earthen ridges and mounds was the subject of another of the sessions in the special Southeast archaeology series at the SAA meeting. 'Not your father's Poverty Point: rewriting old narratives through new research' took as its starting point the observation made 20 years ago that Poverty Point has probably been investigated and written about more than any other site in the entire Lower Mississippi region. What more could there be to discover? And what new interpretations could be brought forth? The session's papers answered these questions by reporting on an extensive range of recent and ongoing work, including geochemical provenancing for the sources of lead and copper recovered from the site, analyses of lithics and baked-clay balls (so-called Poverty Point Objects) and palaeoenvironmental investigations including coring and

[7] Everett, P. 2024. *James*. London: Mantle.
[8] Scott, J. 1986. *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press.
[9] Gill, J.C. McKenzie & E. Lightfoot. 2019. 'Handle with care': literature, archaeology, slavery. *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews,* 44(1): 21–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913

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sedaDNA analysis. Of course, new work does not always resolve old debates and there remains some difference of opinion around the exact chronology of the site and the pace of its construction, the latter argued to be either a protracted and complex sequence lasting centuries or a brief span of perhaps less than a single year. In turn, this debate has implications for interpretation; the authors of the latter position argue that Poverty Point was a place of revelation, "a radical, cosmological ritual intervention, spurred by perceptible climate and environmental changes across the Southeast after ca. 3300 cal BP. The earthworks at Poverty Point are among the materialized remains of ritual performances intentionally initiated by Indigenous people seeking to rebalance an unbalanced world."[10] An interpretation for the times.

Work at Poverty Point is also feeding into wider global research on hunter-gatherer sites that is redefining expectations of forager lifeways.[11] Readers may recall a recent *Antiquity* article on the site of Jaketown, some 100km north-east of Poverty Point and typically considered to be one of the hundreds of sites across the American Southeast that participated in the wider Poverty Point culture. A suite of new radiocarbon dates demonstrate that the construction of extensive earthworks at Jaketown actually pre-date those of Poverty Point, the type site and assumed source of the eponymous cultural package that spread across much of the Southeast USA. Hence, instead of the centre from which an established culture radiated, Poverty Point now appears to be late in the regional sequence, leading the authors to argue that it was the collective outcome of a cultural convergence of multiple communities each with their own distinct histories and practices.[12] Coincidentally or otherwise, that also sounds like a good parallel for New Orleans: a centre formed through the fusion of multiple cultural influences to create an utterly unique place.

Antiquity Prize & Ben Cullen Prize

Every year, the *Antiquity* Trust celebrates the two best articles published in the previous year's volume through the award of the *Antiquity* Prize and the Ben Cullen Prize. As customary, a shortlist was drawn up by our editorial advisory board, and the trustees than ranked and identified the two best articles. This year's winner of the *Antiquity* Prize is 'Re-thinking the "Green Revolution" in the Mediterranean world' by Helena Kirchner, Guillermo García-Contreras, Corisande Fenwick and Aleks Pluskowski (issue 394). The caliphates established around the Mediterranean in the seventh century AD have long been linked with the introduction of new crops and agricultural practices. These developments, and their wider economic and ecological implications, have been grouped together by historians as the so-called 'Islamic Green Revolution'. To date, however, archaeological evidence has played a

[10] Symposia Abstracts of the 2024 SAA 89th Annual Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana: 512. https://documents.saa.org/container/docs/default-source/doc-annua lmeeting/abstract/89th-annual-meeting-abstracts-(new-orleans_la_2024).pdf

[11] E.g. Piezonka, H. *et al.* 2023. The world's oldest-known promontory fort: Amnya and the acceleration of hunter-gatherer diversity in Siberia 8000 years ago. *Antiquity* 97: 1381–1401. https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2023.164; and Menz, M., A. Hollingshead & H. Messer. 2024. *The archaeology of Arcuate communities: spatial patterning and settlement in the Eastern Woodlands*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

[12] Grooms, S.B., G.M.V. Ward & T.R. Kidder. 2023. Convergence at Poverty Point: a revised chronology of the Late Archaic Lower Mississippi Valley. *Antiquity* 97: 1453–69. https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2023.155

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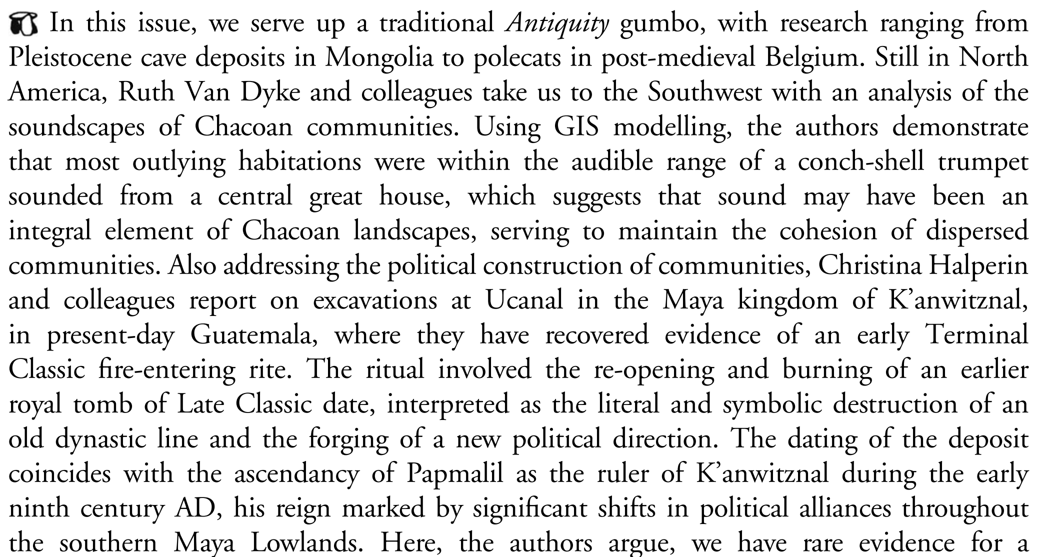
relatively peripheral role in the evaluation of this concept. In their winning article, the authors draw attention to the importance of the growing quantities of archaeological—especially landscape and archaeobotanical—evidence from across this region and the challenges and opportunities of bringing this material into dialogue with the text-based narrative. There are clear barriers to be overcome including, for example, the regional differences in archaeological practice and coverage, but there is also significant potential to be realised in terms of adding nuance to understanding of the timing, scale and diversity of these agrarian developments. For an overview of other recent work on agricultural innovations in the Mediterranean and Southwest Asia, see the review article by Gemma Warham in this issue.

Meanwhile, the winner of the Ben Cullen Prize takes us to the opposite end of Eurasia: 'Disaster, survival and recovery: the resettlement of Tanegashima Island following the Kikai-Akahoya "super-eruption", 7.3ka cal BP' by Junzo Uchiyama, Mitsuhiro Kuwahata, Yukino Kowaki, Nobuhiko Kamijō, Julia Talipova, Kevin Gibbs, Peter D. Jordan and Sven Isaksson (issue 393). The explosive eruption of the Kikai Caldera, on Kyūshū, Japan, was one of the largest volcanic events of the Holocene, wiping out local Jōmon populations and devastating the environment. Eventually, however, this damaged landscape was reoccupied. Focusing on the evidence from Tanegashima Island, the authors argue that this resettlement is a tale of neither societal collapse nor resilience. Instead, they use the 'event horizon' provided by the volcanic tephra to identify both the changes already happening before the eruption and the ways in which the resettlers adapted their subsistence practices to deal with the limited opportunities provided by this damaged ecosystem.

Congratulations to both winners! The prize-winning articles are available to read for free via our website (www.antiquity.ac.uk/open/prizes), where you can also find all the previous winners of the past 30 years.

In this issue



In this issue, we serve up a traditional *Antiquity* gumbo, with research ranging from Pleistocene cave deposits in Mongolia to polecats in post-medieval Belgium. Still in North America, Ruth Van Dyke and colleagues take us to the Southwest with an analysis of the soundscapes of Chacoan communities. Using GIS modelling, the authors demonstrate that most outlying habitations were within the audible range of a conch-shell trumpet sounded from a central great house, which suggests that sound may have been an integral element of Chacoan landscapes, serving to maintain the cohesion of dispersed communities. Also addressing the political construction of communities, Christina Halperin and colleagues report on excavations at Ucanal in the Maya kingdom of K'anwitznal, in present-day Guatemala, where they have recovered evidence of an early Terminal Classic fire-entering rite. The ritual involved the re-opening and burning of an earlier royal tomb of Late Classic date, interpreted as the literal and symbolic destruction of an old dynastic line and the forging of a new political direction. The dating of the deposit coincides with the ascendancy of Papmalil as the ruler of K'anwitznal during the early ninth century AD, his reign marked by significant shifts in political alliances throughout the southern Maya Lowlands. Here, the authors argue, we have rare evidence for a

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historical tipping point, a moment of political rejuvenation amid the wider collapse of southern Maya.

Among the other articles in this issue, we feature a project that seeks to address the (in)compatibility of Harris matrices produced by different projects and the barrier this poses to the reuse and synthesis of excavation data. James Taylor and Keith May introduce a prototype stratigraphical and chronological analysis tool intended to make these data FAIR—that is, findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable. The authors' discussion of the proliferation of excavation data combined with the difficulties of integration, synthesis and interpretation brings to mind a classic *Antiquity* article by Christopher Tilley—who, readers may know, passed away earlier this year. Arguing for the need to put as much emphasis on the interpretation of data as on their acquisition, Tilley turned to a food-based metaphor: "the current state of archaeology can be compared to baking a cake. The end-product—the cake itself—rarely, if ever, gets baked. […] More and more cooks obtain more and more ingredients for the cake, the flour of artefacts, the eggs of structures, the spices of bone residues. The ingredients may be lavishly described […] but usually little happens beyond this. There remains a striking lack of recipes as to how we should bake the cake."[13] If we are now better equipped with theoretical cookbooks than we were 35 years ago, not least due to the work of Tilley himself, our melange of measuring units—kilos, cups, spoons and fluid ounces—still hinders our culinary ambitions.

On which note, whether you prefer cake or gumbo, we hope that something in the current issue whets your appetite. See y'all in August for our 400th issue!

Robert Witcher
Durham, 1 June 2024

[13] Tilley, C. 1989. Excavation as theatre. *Antiquity* 63: 275–80. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00075992

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