

# EDITORIAL

“Природой здесь нам суждено  
В Европу прорубить окно,  
Ногою твёрдой стать при море.  
Сюда по новым им волнам  
Все флаги в гости будут к нам,  
И запируем на просторе”.

*“Here nature bids us take our stand  
And cut a window into Europe,  
To build a haven on the strand  
And welcome ships from every land  
And with our guests make merry ...”*  
A C Pushkin. The Bronze Horseman

As reported by the incomparable Pushkin, Peter the Great was moved to cut a window into Europe by building the city of St Petersburg (briefly Leningrad) which this year celebrated its 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The organisers of the *European Archaeology Association* conference which was held there in September opened a number of windows too – in this case so that Europeans from western countries could gaze into the varied and fascinating archaeology of Russia. And not just European Russia either; of 517 papers presented in 48 parallel sessions, more than 70 were actually about Central Asia. Delegates encountered such diverse topics as Palaeolithic migrations and adaptations in northern Eurasia, Iron Age settlement in the trans-Urals, sub-arctic zones of West Siberia in the sixth-eighth centuries AD, reconstructions of private life from the birch-bark documents of Novgorod, and a session on the archaeological story of St Petersburg itself.

The agenda was particularly interesting for its archaeological theory. Contributors stressed that the Soviet period, which had brought its own rather particular view of the past, was only one episode in the work of a vigorous theoretical college long active in Russia. In the 1850s, Prince P. A. Poutiane corresponded with Lubbock about flints he had discovered at Bologoe, and travelled regularly to Europe, returning laden with the writings of Lyell, Mortillet, Cartailhac and Capitan. Boucher de Perthes visited Russia in 1856, while still shunned by the French scientific establishment. As Igor Tikhonov reminded delegates, the teaching of prehistoric archaeology began at St Petersburg University in the later 1880s at the Department of Geography and Ethnography. By the 1920s, as shown by Nadezhda Platonova, Russian archaeologists regarded their subject as a branch of anthropology, and liked to interpret cultural material in terms of “*social regularities revealed by ethnology*”. In Russian circles, this approach is considered to have long foreshadowed the “New Archaeology” in the west. But sadly those early palaeo-ethnologists – or proto-processualists – had no chance to bring their work to fruition, and the “*majority of their theoretical and methodological work remained unpublished*” due to the dominance of Marxism – then considered “*the only true theory*”. There was also an interesting take on the role of the environment in Russian archaeology from Olena Smyntyna. In Soviet prehistory, ecological case studies began to appear at the end of the 1960s in connection with the large-scale introduction of scientific methods on excavations. But “*unlike western scholars, Soviet scholars are inclined to believe that social factors in prehistory reduce environmental impact on material culture*”. Some would say that east and west are both now getting the social and the environmental into balance.

Other scholars praised the benefits of continual opposition and debate, as a consequence of freedom from a dominant theory: “*a battery can produce an electric current only through the operation of opposing dipoles*” (Andrei Sinitsyn and John Hoffecker). One is full of admiration

that a country which has had to cope with so much politics has also managed to do so much archaeology. Nick Petrov and his team deserve our warmest congratulations. *Antiquity* hopes in future to give still more of a platform to the discoveries and thinking of this vast area, starting with a special feature in the Project Gallery (<http://antiquity.ac.uk>).

Brilliant as the papers were, there breathed few delegates with souls so dead that they could long resist the allure of Anna Akhmatova's city. First stop was naturally the *Hermitage*, well-known as an enormous collection of pictures, initiated by Catherine the Great and swollen by many later donors (willing or



Bill Tidy at the Hermitage

enforced) such as Count Stroganoff (of beef stew fame). The miles of overpoweringly ornate rooms hung with lush nudes contemplated by elks soon make a revolution seem entirely reasonable. Less well known, but truly electrifying in its impact, is the collection of archaeological finds from the south-central part of Russia contained in the basement at the end of the building. Here one sees the fabulous Scythian gold, the tattooed leathery skin, models of frozen tombs from Pazyryk, the wooden griffin from south Siberia and a huge tree-trunk coffin from Tuekta of the fourteenth century BC. Over 4m long and 1.5m in diameter and reputedly made from a larch tree, it provided much encouragement for those of us who propose a coffin of comparable grandeur in the burial chamber of Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo.

Outside St Petersburg, the change in scenery is startlingly abrupt. Hundreds of flat miles of birch and bog are punctuated by widely dispersed villages constructed of logs and corrugated iron, their more ancient occupants recalling the country folk of Tolstoy. Our destination was Saryia Ladoga, an eighth to tenth century timber town beside the River Volkhov with a fine set of mound burials (including a cremation boat-grave). The early town was later replaced by a fifteenth century castle and church which, suitably smartened and restored, provide the

*A stone statue of the twelfth century AD which stood on a burial mound in the Polovstian region of central Russia (north of the Black Sea). A woman of spiritual authority who terminated the burial sequence contained in the mound, she carries a pendant amulet, a comb, key and basin. Hermitage Museum.*



principal attractions today. Our young guide, clad in a black leather jacket, drainpipe trousers and a silver ear-ring, was fluently amusing in English. Although self-taught, he had laid the ghosts of soviet historiography, and had a thoroughly modern approach to archaeology. Yes, it was true that Scandinavians had been temporarily excluded from the narrative of early Russian history. “But as everyone today knows, they came here and there is nothing to be done about it now”. One of our party was rash enough to ask if a certain sword pommel on exhibition in the castle was “German”. “Madam”, he replied severely, “a sword cannot have a nationality. That sword was no doubt made by a Swede, used by Finn and buried with a Slav”. The archaeological voice of the new Russia promises uplifting insights in the days to come.

 The Field Unit of the city of St Denis (France) is now thirty years old and still digging up its town. This great success story is owed mainly to the Commune of St Denis, which has continued through thick and thin to regard archaeology as among its public assets, calling it ‘the source of the future’. By 1996, when the magnificent *Atlas Historique de Saint-Denis* was published, the team reckoned to have investigated 12 per cent of the Medieval town, 2 per cent by area excavation. Nicole Meyer-Rodrigues, Olivier Meyer, Michel Wyss and Dave Coxall are among the names of those archaeologists who made all this happen on the ground.

Meanwhile across the Channel we have a few similarly robust and long-lived urban companies such as the York Archaeological Trust, but professional archaeology as a whole is moving on, into the era of the consultant. This highly interesting new player is now responsible for negotiating and designing the majority of the prescriptions for what was once known as “rescue archaeology”. Once upon a time we all worked for the state, and then developers were encouraged to pay for “preservation by record” – the total removal of deposits out of the ground and (theoretically) onto the book shelves. Since 1990 there have been other options, such as “preservation in situ”, and the consultant has appeared to help developers and planners decide how far preservation or digging is the best solution in each case. And now research too can at last be a factor in the decision. We can design the research into a project, instead of designing the archaeology out.

Consultants are in especially powerful positions. Although paid by the developer, they inevitably assume responsibilities for the archaeology. They thus combine the role of a freelance with that of a public servant – a mixture between the developer’s planning advisor, the old type of Unit director and the US “Shippo” (State Historic Preservation Officer). Britain has moved very rapidly in the last 20 years from having a state archaeological service, through project funding carried out by established units, to the new consultancy system, always one pace behind the process of deregulation and privatisation. The idea of debating the relative value of different heritage options as a professional adversarial matter (rather than relying on the opinion of a government servant) seems excellent to me, but only if research has a seat at the table. Academics and consultants working together could provide the community with the most important archeological outcome of any development project – its research dividend.

 So back to the marking of dissertations after a glorious summer in the field. First it is necessary to master this year’s mark sheet and its rubric, given that intellectual judgment has now been supplanted in the University sector by codes: “65 per cent = showing a moderate knowledge, with some better, some worse insights, and some originality, but not a great deal, and not as much as you would expect in a 66”. The modern student likes to combine a loving catalogue of nineteenth

century drainpipes with social theory; gutters have style, poise, utterance and menace, and relate to male and female spaces at different corners of a building, depending on whether they gush or dribble. Material culture is not just active these days – it has attitude. Perhaps we need an anonymous friendly service to guide us through: “Welcome to the Markers’ Help-Line. This is a confidential service, although your hysteria may be recorded for training purposes. Please enter your date of birth, sex and mother’s maiden name. If your inquiry is about the significance of this year’s mark sheet, please press 1 on your telephone now. For gender problems, press 2. If you want to know who accepted a particular student for the course, press 3. For a lawyer, press 4”.

Was Stonehenge a giant vagina? Professor Anthony Perks certainly thinks so, and obligingly provides a map to help those unfamiliar with the geography of these two ancient mysteries. Archaeologists will be pleased to note that the whole site is laden with gender messages: “*To a biologist, the smooth and rougher stones arranged in pairs, united by their heavy lintels, suggest a male and female, father and mother joined together*”. I did promise Brian Fagan (among others) that I would not mention Stonehenge for at least a year, but have included this in homage to a great former editor, Glyn Daniel, who would no doubt have pronounced it ‘delicious’. Professor Perks and his co-author Darlene Bailey both of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of British Columbia, published their findings in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* (96, 2003) 94-98, and invite correspondence.

Welcome to *Current World Archaeology* which was launched in September with the distribution of 100,000 free copies. Andrew and Wendy Selkirk’s *Current Archaeology* has long been a mainstay for British readers, carrying often the first (and sometime the only) report of new excavations in Britain. Andrew, Wendy and son Robert now take on the world with their new magazine. It’s bright, it’s glossy and full of famous places in the mould of *Archaeology* and *Archéologie* or even *L’Archéologue*. Subtitled “Digs and Discoveries from around the world” it will give much pleasure to curious browsers and stimulation to tourism. We at *Antiquity* (the first current world archaeology journal) are convinced that there is an unflagging interest in the diverse experience of life on this planet, as revealed by archaeological research. There are many more potential readers out there, and the talented Selkirk family will find them.

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