

## Special regional section: the western Pacific rim

Once upon a time, when archaeology was the sole concern of Europeans and north Americans, exploratory expeditions went to exotic parts of the globe. The physical finds came back to the metropolitan museums. The intellectual discoveries were put in metropolitan journals and books, where those without that specific regional focus fell across them.

This process has now largely ceased – though not as long ago as one might expect. John Mulvaney's *Prehistory of Australia* (1969), the first full illumination of what Mulvaney himself called 'the dark continent of prehistory' (Mulvaney 1969: 12), was first published in London. But its paperback edition, published in Australia, was never available in Europe, and its successor (White & O'Connell 1982) came from the Sydney office of a multinational publisher.

The same is true of papers. What once might have been sent 'home' to the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* now appears in the admirable *Archaeology in Oceania* (A\$33 annually, A\$28 for students: Mackie Building, University of Sydney, NSW 2006), or the less formal *Australian Archaeology* (A\$20 annually, A\$10 for students: Australian Museum, PO Box A285, Sydney South, NSW 2000).

This issue's special focus is on the area running from China and Japan S to Australia – which I have clumsily called the 'western Pacific rim'. Why is it so interesting? In the N, archaeology itself has a sufficiently different intellectual context, as **John Olsen** and **Atholl Anderson** here explain, for a westerner to see both a barrier to add to that of language and a remarkable thing in its own right. The history of archaeology in Japan is comparable with that in Europe (below, p. 270) and in China seems longer than anywhere (below, p. 282). The substantive findings have distinctive features, from the early hominids in China and early pottery in Japan through to the particular character of their state formations. **Ian Glover** here summarizes, as best can be done in a couple of pages, a major guide to the Chinese record.

Missing, with regret, from this section is a paper from island SE Asia. Recently reported are finds from the Huon peninsula, New Guinea, where, associated with coral terraces and securely dated by  $^{14}\text{C}$  and volcanic ashes, are large polished-stone waisted axes – most

remarkable artefacts in themselves for 30,000 b.p. and earlier. So far, publication (Groube et al. 1986) has not explored the archaeological inferences of their function: we may find gardening of some kind is three times as old here as it appears in more orthodox hearths of agriculture.

The early Australian record is better known: Gowlett's remarks above, p. 215, indicate its value for the global pattern of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. But the alienation of archaeologists from Aboriginal attitudes and the re-burial issue really do threaten fieldwork for the future, as **Steven Webb** explains here. **Elizabeth Williams** gives a view on hunter-gatherer intensification from the Australian swamps, itself a reminder that the Australian record is unique as the one continent in which no fully agricultural adaptations arose.

From historical archaeology – barely 200 years of it, but supporting the *Australian Journal of Historical Archaeology* – **Gordon Young** studies colonial settlement patterns in relation to European ethnicity.

I started this brief introduction with some colonial remarks. Archaeologists of the western Pacific area need no more colonizing: they now have a body of experience and expertise which others need to be taught by. The Americas make the twin of Australia/Sahul, as the other continent that was occupied by humans rather late; and the record of research in, and claims for, early man in the Americas is a more confused and a less happy story than the reliable data now accumulated in Australia and New Guinea. The time has come for archaeologists from the newest world to straighten out the early settlement of the merely New World.

Among this number's reviews are two dealing specifically with the region, pp. 325 and 348.

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### References

- GROUBE, L., J. CHAPPELL, J. MUKE & D.A. PRICE. 1986. 40,000 year-old human occupation site at Huon peninsula, Papua New Guinea, *Nature* 324: 453–5.
- MULVANEY, D.J. 1969. *The prehistory of Australia*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- WHITE, J.P. & J. O'CONNELL. 1982. *The prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul*. Sydney: Academic Press.