
editorial

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A decade of debate

The present issue marks the tenth birthday of *Archaeological dialogues* as an international academic journal. What once began as an English-language periodical established by a small group of Dutch graduate students has now evolved into a leading international journal for debating interpretative, theoretical, methodological, historical and political issues in archaeology. This development has taken us as much by surprise as it has far exceeded original intentions and expectations. When the journal was set up in Leiden in the early 1990s, the key aim of *Archaeological dialogues* was to promote and, indeed, provoke theoretical discussion in Dutch archaeology. Inspired by the fascinating theoretical developments in Anglo-American archaeology and anthropology of that time, the editors sought to reconcile these exciting new ideas with the long-standing empirical traditions of continental European archaeology. This ambition was readily evident from the subtitle that was carried on the cover for the first four years: ‘Dutch perspectives on current issues in archaeology’.

Much has changed since then. The editors are no longer confined to Leiden but now hail from places as diverse and as distant as Chicago, Glasgow, Leicester, Berlin, Amsterdam and Brussels. Articles are no longer primarily solicited from Dutch colleagues, but are submitted from all over the world. And the readership has evolved from being primarily based in the Low Countries to spanning the breadth of the international archaeological community.

All these developments have now combined to bring a change of publisher, too. While Van Gorcum publishers have played a critical role in realizing and supporting the journal during the first nine years of its existence, not least by taking up the gauntlet of launching a new academic journal, the increasing international appeal of *Archaeological dialogues* has made an association with one of the major academic publishers an obvious next step. We are therefore particularly pleased that this anniversary issue also inaugurates our collaboration with Cambridge University Press.

These gratifying and far-reaching developments notwithstanding, the fundamental ambition of *Archaeological dialogues* has never changed. This basic aim is to stimulate archaeological research that is not only theoretically engaged but also empirically sound, and politically aware of the social and historical implications of its practices. We believe in fact that excellent research is undertaken in very different segments of our ever-increasing

discipline, to which the pages of past issues of *Archaeological dialogues* may testify. Not so much yet another catwalk for theoretical fashions or trendy research topics, *Archaeological dialogues* continues its endeavour to provide a genuine forum for the creative exploration, critical development and constructive discussion of new ideas in archaeology. At the end of its first decade, it remains more than ever the ambition of *Archaeological dialogues* to constitute *a journal for debating contemporary archaeology*.

How can this be achieved? Quite easily, in principle, by balancing two basic criteria: pluralism and quality; in practice, a substantial amount of hard work by editors and anonymous referees must also be brought into the equation. In order to safeguard pluralism, we wholeheartedly embrace diversity and indeed purposefully seek out debate, while actively resisting becoming the mouthpiece of one particular branch of archaeology. Pluralism also means interdisciplinarity, including interaction between the various archaeological subdisciplines; indeed, we come ourselves from backgrounds as diverse as prehistoric archaeology, classical archaeology and modern material culture studies. Quality is based on the excellence of much work that is carried out at all levels and in all branches of the discipline and is selected and improved with the assistance of our advisory board and many other colleagues who have assisted us with anonymous reviews. Although it is not always easy to sustain discussion across (sub)disciplinary and conceptual boundaries, we remain convinced that a real engagement with paradigmatic differences is in the end more productive than a sterile and ultimately gratuitous ‘anything goes’ type of tolerance. *Archaeological dialogues* is not only a speaker’s corner where scholars can stand up and talk, but it is also a forum where people may listen and contribute to a discussion.

In practice, we work to realize these ideals as follows:

- *Archaeological dialogues* shuns narrow chronological and regional limits, emphasizing the importance of theoretical engagement and methodological debate.
- Particular, but not exclusive, attention is given to a number of broad themes, that obviously vary with the currents of wider debates. At present, our main themes are interpretative strategies related to material culture, the archaeology of cultural landscapes, innovative methods and techniques, and the socio-historical analysis of archaeological practice.
- In chronological terms, we warmly welcome innovative research from the Palaeolithic to the present day; while the Old World constitutes our primary geographical focus for practical reasons, we do publish contributions dealing with other parts of the world, as long as their conceptual and methodological implications transcend the particularities of the region involved.

The format of *Archaeological dialogues* plays a critical role in our endeavour to promote discussion and construct dialogues across (sub)disciplines. First and foremost come our long *discussion articles*, which are major articles accompanied by expert commentary and a reply. They invariably constitute the mainstay of each issue. Next come shorter and more specific *notes*, of

which several can be found in each issue. Less frequent are in-depth *interviews* with scholars whose work has a particular relevance to the themes addressed in *Archaeological dialogues*. A new feature are *review essays*, which provide state-of-the-art summaries of recent developments in one particular field such as colonialism, history of archaeology or social memory. Written by distinguished experts, these will prove invaluable for students and scholars alike.

The present issue can be seen to exemplify the journal's ambitions. Nathan Schlanger's discussion article on colonialist archaeology, Adrian Chadwick's plea for a reflexive field methodology, Alexander Joffe's essay on the muddled notion of identity and Visa Immonen's interview with Leo Klejn do not only relate to fascinating aspects of South African, Anglo-American and Russian archaeology. They equally enrich contemporary archaeology by highlighting new empirical, historical and conceptual dimensions. Schlanger's reliance on archival sources adds a new chapter to standard histories of archaeology and invites us to understand the social factors responsible for the production of scientific knowledge. Chadwick, in turn, draws our attention to the peculiar social parameters of the very excavation process itself. His call for a more radical field methodology proposes adding reflexive praxis to Schlanger's historical awareness. Joffe goes yet one more step further in seeking to apply reflexivity also to the public realm, or rather to the interface between scholarly discourse and public perception. This was incidentally the very issue that was addressed by the three winning essays of the *Archaeological dialogues* essay competition published last year (issue 9.2). But every discussion of the social structures affecting the practice of archaeology is humbled by the personal biography of those scholars who have had to work under oppressive systems of authority and who have tried to make a difference. Visa Immonen's interview with Leo Klejn, one of the most remarkable but least understood archaeologists of our age, is breathtaking in places. His disavowal of the political appropriation of archaeology was, as he said, 'the stimulus for me to venture into theoretical research'. We can only feel inspired by that.

Editing and publishing *Archaeological dialogues* has always been and remains first and foremost a collective undertaking and we therefore wish to thank all our friends who have previously worked with us to realize *Archaeological dialogues*. The initial editorial board was made up of Jos Bazelmans, Peter van Dommelen and Jan Kolen, with Jan Slofstra and David Van Reybrouck joining them soon after. Fokke Gerritsen, David Fontijn and Ton Derks stepped in when Jos, Jan and Jan resigned. Most recently, as David Fontijn left, Michael Dietler, Sarah Tarlow and Alexander Gramsch have joined our ranks.

We end with a note on our famous mask. Despite a restyling of the cover, the mask is still there, albeit with a twist. Why? This remarkable object was found in the Iron Age settlement of Middelstum in the province of Groningen, the Netherlands. As a unique find, it resists easy interpretation. With only one eye and half a mouth, it represents the fragmentary nature of archaeological evidence, the elusiveness of the past, and the need for ongoing discussion in a field where interpretation is open-ended. The addition of a second fragment on

our new cover demonstrates that new finds continue to be made and that our efforts to piece together the past must be taken both literally and symbolically, as with all material culture. Debating contemporary archaeology can and sometimes must be both polemical and poetical, a matter both of shouting and of silence. As a prehistoric pendant to Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, we cherish this mask because it talks, cries, whispers and hides all at once.