



KafSerdakni Cave, courtesy of the Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project (featured in this month's Project Gallery).



Aerial photograph of Hamedan province, western Iran, in the Zagros Highlands, with the purpose of discovering evidence of the Royal Road that ran between Mesopotamia and Media (featured in this month's Project Gallery; photograph courtesy of Behzad Balmaki).

EDITORIAL

Pyramids and presidents

It is not often that Egyptology features in US presidential campaigns, but such was the case back in November when Republican candidate Ben Carson asserted that the pyramids of Egypt were built not for burials but as grain stores. He had held this view for some time, apparently ascertaining it from the biblical narrative that tells how Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, rose to be the pharaoh's right-hand man and built grain stores in the seven years of plenty to prepare for the seven lean years to follow (Genesis 41). Whether or not there is some historical truth behind that story, a leap of faith of an entirely different order is required to believe that the pyramids were the grain stores in question. Carson's theory has been widely—and quite properly—dismissed, and one could well ask, does it matter? But surely it must. Ignorance of the past among politicians, and the public at large, is not encouraging, and if they take so little notice of evidence from archaeology, will they do any better elsewhere?

This kind of ignorance is particularly alarming when archaeology is under such sustained and unprecedented attack in the Middle East, and given that it plays such a prominent part in the politics, ideology and (through systematic looting) funding of the so-called Islamic State.

It is not just the lands immediately affected by this that have suffered. Egypt too has been badly hit by the civil disturbances that followed the fall of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011. The 'Arab Spring' all too quickly turned into lawlessness and insecurity, and, as so often happens, archaeology was one of the losers. Storehouses and museums were attacked, and sites were damaged by development and looting. The scale of the damage has been difficult to quantify, given the circumstances on the ground. Clearly, some sites have been protected and have fared relatively well, whereas others have been riddled with looting pits or engulfed by fields or new buildings as unscrupulous individuals took advantage of the collapse of law and order.

How much has been lost, and what might be done to protect what has been damaged? For some years, Sarah Parcak and her team have been using satellite imagery to identify new sites in the Nile Valley and adjacent deserts. With this technology, she has also been able to locate and measure the scale of destruction in Egypt, and to chart its progress from 2008, through the troubled years following Mubarak's overthrow, to the more stable conditions that eventually followed. Her findings are published in this issue of *Antiquity* (Parcak *et al.* pp. 188–205) and make for disquieting reading. The importance of the work has recently

been recognised by the award of the one-million dollar TED Prize last November. The money can be spent on a project of the recipient's choosing, and Sarah will be announcing her new project at the TED conference this month (February 2016).

The TED Prize is awarded annually to “an individual with a creative, bold vision to spark global change [...] to inspire the world” (<https://www.ted.com/participate/ted-prize>). This is an ambitious mission, but it is encouraging to see archaeological concerns recognised in such a public way; it restores some of one's faith in the future.

Kon-tacts and connections

☞ Connections have always been one of archaeology's *leitmotifs*. Many early attempts to understand the patterning of world cultures, past and present, relied on often dubious assumptions. Ambitious mappings of contact and diffusion were envisaged on a global scale, with little supporting evidence other than the general conviction that this kind of thing had happened. A classic, if extreme, example was Sir Grafton Elliott Smith's *The diffusion of culture* (1933¹), in which everything from ear mutilation to the boomerang was traced back to a single point of origin, usually in Egypt. Given such excesses, it is hardly surprising that archaeologists have since been very cautious about accepting such long-distance connections. Yet the possibilities are there, and advances in ancient DNA and stable isotope analysis have brought them once more to the fore.

Just as new science is giving substance to some earlier thinking, so explorers have again embraced the challenge of showing how long-distance voyaging may indeed have been possible. Readers of more mature years will be familiar with the Kon-Tiki expedition led by Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl in 1947. Setting sail on a balsa wood raft, he aimed to show how Inca seafarers could have made landfall on Polynesian islands, bringing with them the cultural and technological skills that gave rise to the Easter Island statues on Rapa Nui. *Kon-Tiki* successfully covered 6900km of open ocean in just over 100 days. The raft itself can be seen in a special Kon-Tiki Museum at Bygdøy on the edge of Oslo. This whole area is a celebration of Norwegian seafaring and exploration: the Fram Museum with the ships used by Nansen and Amundsen in their Polar expeditions lies next door, while a 10-minute walk brings you to the *Vikingskipshuset*, the Viking Ship Museum containing the spectacular eighth- and ninth-century vessels from burials at Oseberg and Gokstad.

Kon-Tiki2, as the new expedition is called, is hence following in a long tradition. There are in fact two balsa wood rafts, rather than the single raft used by Thor Heyerdahl, but the leader is once again an experienced Norwegian explorer, Torgeir Higræff. The aim, this time, is not only to reach Rapa Nui but also to make the return journey back to Peru, a much more difficult prospect given the pattern of prevailing winds and tides.

Kon-Tiki2 left Peru four months ago and its progress can be followed on the website (<http://www.kontiki2.com>). One wishes them every success, although it has to be said that the archaeological evidence for any contact of this kind is very thin, and current genetic evidence is not persuasive. Whether any Peruvians did reach Polynesia is perhaps ultimately less important than the complete absence of any long-term impact. It is somewhat more probable that Polynesian voyagers reached South America than that Peruvians reached


¹ Smith, G.E. 1933. *The diffusion of culture*. London: Watts.



Figure 1. The Gokstad ship in the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Norway; © University of Oslo.

Polynesia, but even here, if that did happen, nothing much seems to have come of it. The Norse contact with North America can be put in the same bracket; a scatter of Viking artefacts across eastern Canada does not amount to much. It is a far cry indeed from the calamitous impact of Columbus and his successors on the indigenous peoples of Central and South America.

Kofun, Kaffee and Kuchen

 The value of comparative archaeology—of looking at specific regions or case studies within a wider perspective—has been one of the leading themes of *Antiquity* editorials over the years. A recent illustration of the benefits of the broad view was a workshop held at the University of Tübingen late last year, which brought specialists on the mounded tombs and princely centres of the Hallstatt Iron Age together with Japanese archaeologists studying the mounded tombs known as *kofun*. South-west Germany is famous for its Hallstatt sites (not to mention the excellent *Kaffee* and *Kuchen*); recent revelations at the Heuneburg were described in *Antiquity* in 2013²), and there are spectacular new findings from the ‘Keltenblock’, the 80-tonne block removed from the richly furnished grave at Bettenbühl nearby, which was extracted by crane for excavation in the laboratory. There has been much

² Fernández-Götz, M. & D. Krause. 2013. Rethinking Early Iron Age urbanisation in Central Europe: the Heuneburg site and its archaeological environment. *Antiquity* 87: 473–87. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00049073>

debate as to the nature of Hallstatt society, centring on the level of social hierarchy that these impressive sites represent. These debates fall into a different perspective, however, alongside the massive, keyhole-shaped *kofun* of Japan. The largest of all *kofun*, the fifth-century tomb traditionally attributed to the Emperor Nintoku, is almost 500m long and 35m high, and is surrounded by a triple moat. There is little dispute that tombs such as these were the work of a state society able to mobilise labour on a truly enormous scale. They are several times greater in size than the largest of the Hallstatt mounds, and their dimensions can only really be paralleled by the Giza pyramids of Khufu and Khephren, and by the tomb of the first Chinese emperor, Shihuangdi at Xian.

It is not only the scale of the tombs that raises the game, but their tightly patterned morphology, and the ideology that must have lain behind them. All this we were able to discuss at length during this workshop, by virtue of the fact that both our German hosts and Japanese colleagues were able and willing to present their work in English. Those of us born into the Anglophone world are fortunate that English has become the leading international language of scholarly discourse, although equally it is sad to see how far foreign-language skills have declined in many Anglophone countries. Despite the upsurge in English-language publication, the archaeological record can only really be grasped by engaging with the detailed regional literature, and, just as importantly, we all have a responsibility to present the results of archaeological research to local communities in their own language.

Dictionaries are of course an essential tool for working in foreign languages, yet many standard dictionaries make hard work of archaeological terminology. The new WaKoku online archaeological dictionary that was launched at the Tübingen workshop is accordingly very much to be welcomed (see <http://wakoku.eu>). It bridges the three languages (Japanese, German and English), and is the accomplishment of Werner Steinhaus from Hiroshima University, under the supervision of Ulrich Apel, programmed by Jiayi Zheng from Tübingen and supported by the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures. *Antiquity's* remit is world archaeology, and we are always keen to receive high quality papers from East Asia. Let us hope that the new dictionary helps push forward that agenda and brings us all a little closer together.

Archaeology and austerity

📖 Readers of *Antiquity* may recall the proposal of the UK government to divide English Heritage into two separate units: one responsible for the sites, monuments and buildings in the ownership or guardianship of the state; the other for policy and planning controls relating to historic buildings and archaeology (see 'Editorial' *Antiquity* June 2015³). That proposal came into effect on 1 April last year, when the 400 or so historic buildings, monuments and sites (known as the National Heritage Collection) were transferred to a new charitable body, which (rather confusingly) has inherited the old name of English Heritage. A separate body, Historic England, is now responsible for the statutory protection of archaeological sites and issues relating to planning and development control; it falls under the aegis of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). On 25 November 2015,

³ Scarre, C. 2015. Editorial. *Antiquity* 89: 523–530. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2015.48>

the government announced its future spending plans (the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review). These include a cut of 5% to the DCMS budget over the next four years (until 2020), but a significantly larger cut (10%) to Historic England. These cuts are less severe than many had feared, but heritage has clearly not fared well in this financial settlement. We wait with anxiety to see how it will affect the activities and effectiveness of Historic England in protecting our archaeology.

Hitherto, however, UK archaeology has not suffered as much as many of our continental neighbours. In Spain, for example, the latest government spending plans under the heading 'Conservation and restoration of cultural property' indicate a reduction from almost 41 million euros in 2012, to 26 million euros in 2016, while the 'Protection of the historic patrimony' sees a fall from 7.5 million euros to 4.5 million euros over the same period (see <https://parpatrimonioytecnologia.wordpress.com/2015/08/05/arqueologia-y-patrimonio-en-los-presupuestos-generales-del-estado-del-2016/>). There has also been a significant emigration of young postdocs from Spain seeking employment elsewhere: in the UK, Germany, Scandinavia, France, the USA and, to a lesser extent, Latin America. Opportunities within Spain are only a fraction of what they were a decade ago. Felipe Criado also writes of the weakening of heritage protection laws, as the pressure to promote growth and development overtakes all other concerns: the regional government of Madrid, controlled by the Conservative Government, has changed the regional law of Cultural Heritage, creating a trend that has been followed by other autonomous regional governments. The Galician government, for example, has recently submitted a draft proposal for a new law of this kind to public review. Prosperity and overall employment are important, but it is sad to see archaeology and cultural heritage at risk in this way.

In Greece, as might be expected, the situation is even more challenging. Kostas Kotsakis has provided the following summary:

Obviously, the very serious economic crisis has affected everything in Greece, and archaeology is no exception. In the University, there have been six years now during which no new academic staff have been appointed to replace retirements. As a result, in the Department of Archaeology at Thessaloniki University, we have lost 30% of the teaching staff during the last five years alone, and another 30% will have retired within the next four years. The university budget for excavation and research has been so drastically cut that almost no training excavations have been able to operate in the field, and we have been limited to studying finds in the university labs. Severe cuts have been enforced also to administrative staff. A similar situation applies in other departments of archaeology in Greece.

State archaeology in Greece has for many years now functioned mainly through European Structural Funds, a source which is almost exhausted, while rescue excavation is, as a rule, financed by developers or state companies. Since very little building or construction activity is taking place, as a result of the economic crisis, excavation has been greatly reduced. There is no budget for study and publication. The staff of the Archaeological Service has not been directly reduced, but there are no new jobs in archaeology, save for rare contract jobs. No wonder most of our graduates emigrate.

The legislation has not changed so far, and public opinion in Greece is relatively sensitive to issues of heritage. There are technical ways of bending the law, however, and we are anxious to see what will happen when a really major investment comes seriously into conflict with the protection of heritage. We can anticipate the outcome.

Overall, the situation is not bright. Archaeology in Greece has slowed dramatically, although it has not stopped. The Ministry of Culture (responsible for archaeology) was downgraded to the status of a sub ministry within the Ministry of Education by SYRIZA in January 2015, then upgraded as an independent ministry again after the recent elections in September 2015. Very few Greeks believe, however, that this upgrade will actually have a positive effect on the future of archaeology in Greece.

Sobering words indeed. We can only hope that as the European economy recovers, the situation will reverse and archaeology will once again receive stronger financial support. In the meantime, we must make the argument as strongly as we can. After all, the passionate outcry over the tragic destruction of cultural heritage in the Near East is surely ample, if depressing, testimony to its outstanding value for us all. In that respect it is encouraging, if perhaps a little ironic, that while cutting the funding to Historic England, the UK government is planning to invest £30 million in a new Cultural Protection Fund to provide international support for cultural heritage in global conflict zones. That gives, at least, a positive note on which to end.

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Durham, 1 February 2016