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A window of opportunity indeed!

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As with the birth of one more baby in an already densely over-populated planet, there is local rejoicing but often global pessimism: so with the arrival of another archaeological journal. Hard-pressed academics tend to despair at the prospect of extra reading, while budget officers wince for lack of funds and librarians groan for lack of space. Only the IT community support the venture provided that it is on-line. What is to be done? Is infanticide coming back into fashion ...?

This scenario may be valid for many new journals but not, I suggest, for the new Czech journal *Interdisciplinaria Archaeologica. Natural Sciences in Archaeology*. Published both on-line and in hard copy, this splendid new journal takes as its foundational metaphor the “window of opportunity”. As four members of the Editorial Board state in their first Editorial, Jaromír Beneš, Robert Brukner, Ondřej Mlejnek and Jaroslav Peška perceive continuing mutual incomprehension between Eastern and Western archaeologists. They hope to reduce this by opening up a window to see the vast landscape of Central and Eastern European archaeology.

The editorial board are fully aware that vision is an ideologically loaded metaphor from landscape painting: who does the seeing, who is seen and through which framing device, are all deeply ideological questions. But the first volume of the new journal suggests an excellent solution to these ideological conundrums – a wide selection of articles from many different disciplines, specialisms and countries – NOT only the Czech Republic – indeed a selection that is true to the journal title. Since the editorial board has secured the support of Western archaeologists to reduce mutual incomprehension, the question “who is seeing?” is also answered in a sensible way. Indeed, it is a tragedy for Central European archaeology that the death of Marek Zvelebil has deprived the new journal of a fine grandparent!

The first edition sets a high standard for production, with high-quality paper, wonderful colour and black-and-white images and very few infelicities in the English-only text. In short, the baby has been born healthily, the multiple parents are in fine shape (the “mother” – perhaps Jaromír Beneš – especially!) and the environment for further growth and

development is excellent. But what does the baby look like?

The content is divided into longer pieces (“Articles”), shorter pieces (“News and Views”) and book reviews. The first section begins with an exceptionally interesting and thought-provoking article by Nikitin *et al.* on the chronology & mDNA of Tripillyan deposits in the Verteba ritual cave, which emphasises the heterogeneity of the Tripillye gene pool and reinforces doubts about the King & Underhill hypothesis linking Y chromosome haplogroup Eu9 and painted pottery production. The wide range of mostly mid-4th millennium calBC14C dates is important but there is no critical discussion of direct dates on pottery, currently a major focus in Ukrainian archaeology. Merkl’s study of the selection of Bell Beaker metals in Central Europe, based upon trace element analysis, shows that other groups used the same copper types as users of Bell Beakers, with a predominance of fahlerz coppers in some regions. The hypothesis of Bell Beaker prospectors and smiths was therefore falsified. Sherbakov *et al.* examined the LBA settlement of Muradymovo, West of Chelyabinsk in terms of palaeo-sols (black meadow soils) and dating of the houses (mid-2nd millennium calBC), again using direct dating of pottery. Here, although there is a technical discussion of the problems of dating pottery directly, the discussion is not related to the findings. The excavated houses are well-presented but it would be interesting to know what was found between and outside the houses.

Bernardová *et al.* continue with the LBA settlement theme, this time in Czech Republic, where at Turnov – Maškovy Zahrady, large quantities of fragmented barley grains (*H. vulgare* var. *hexastichon*) were preserved in large pits. This food preparation was equated with the production of bulgur as in the Mediterranean, where the grain is ground on a saddle quern before boiling for a nutritious human food. From a personal perspective, this article is notable for introducing fragmentation studies into archaeobotany! Kočár *et al.* show the benefit of multi-disciplinary approaches to the environment, economy and subsistence strategies of the Early Medieval town of Žatec. Studies of pollen, macro-fossils and charcoal allow a complex picture of change across 300 years, dated earlier (AD 9th–11th centuries) than

the traditional AD 13th century date for the transformation of the Czech state. Increases in winter rye and crops weeds show the introduction of a three-field system, increasing softwood charcoal suggests intensification of iron-smelting, while the pollen record indicates expanded human impact throughout the period.

Vránová *et al.*'s dendrochronological dating of a wood-lined cistern in Tepenec Castle to AD 1548 raises interesting historical questions, since documents suggest the castle was abandoned and in ruinous state in the AD 16th century. This study provokes historians to return to their documents and transcend the anomaly.... Vargová & Horáčková's palaeopathological consideration of the pattern of children's diseases is based upon a sample of over 600 burials from the Iron Age to the modern period. Vitamin C and D deficiency was common, together with some traumatic injuries and congenital defects. It is a sad reflection of the discipline that palaeopathology is ALWAYS about bad news! The interpretation of palaeopathological conditions is also discussed by the same authors in a short piece based upon the Masaryk University (Brno)'s extensive reference collection.

In the "News and Views" section, there is more **bad news** in Pankowská *et al.*'s short piece about Neolithic TRB cranial defects (34th century calBC). The deposition with the adult female of freshwater mussel beads, discussed with many regional parallels, suggested a high-status burial. However, the female was suffering from congenital scaphocephaly – premature closure of the cranial sutures – as well as exhibiting Harris lines on long bones. While she may not have had mental problems, she probably was "different" from other members of her community – hence the special burial. The parallel with the Tărtăria pit burial (Transylvania) is striking. Human body fragmentation is now very widely reported (*e.g.*, Rebay-Salisbury *et al.* 2010) and a further case of post-mortem dispersal of body parts is reported here by Zatloukal & Živný. An incomplete AD 10th burial of a 50-year-old woman in Olomouc – Denisova Street raises the question not answered by natural science – where were the missing body parts and why were they removed?

Dvořáková's precise study of the Romanesque mural paintings in St. Catherine's rotunda at Znojmo shows how AD 11th century architects related the orientation of the building to the contemporary sunrise on the day of the Assumption of Mary and how mural designers used the age at death of Jesus Christ (33 years) to define the length of the

rotunda's ground-plan (33 feet) and the number of figures in the murals. The same author also presents a detailed study of the AD 14th century Gothic murals at Nebovidy. Valová & Glisníková discuss the chance discovery of an underground storage-pit (cellar) or "loch" (German) in the town of Miroslav. Geophysical prospection was used to indicate a branching system of underground lanes, some of which had subsequently been turned into "lochs". There are over 120 sites in Moravia with *lochs*, including prehistoric examples – perhaps a neglected research field? The volume concludes with an additional study on art history – a book review by Hanušová of Hašek & Unger's religious architecture in the Czech Republic.

Returning to the founding metaphor, the light flooding through the window of opportunity identified by Beneš and his colleagues is in fact diffracted into many different colours and shades of colour – an archaeo-botanical shade of green here, silver genetics there, an art-historical shade of red here, some archaeo-metallurgical brown there, some geophysical prospection in purple here, colour clashes between archaeology and history there, as well as some palaeopathology lurking in the black shadows. The rich palette of Central and Eastern European archaeology is indeed well-represented and, judging from the archaeological projects currently under way in these regions, there is a lot more colour to come!

If there is one pane of glass that blocks the light, it is the dull, opaque pane of archaeological theory. The fragmented body from Olomouc reminds us that the addition of the natural sciences to archaeology cannot always solve what are at the same time pressing **social** issues. This journal – as with the regions it illuminates – is still some way from a full appreciation of the post-processual critique – indeed many appear to consider it of no overall research value at all. This is a **BIG CHALLENGE** for a new, forward-looking journal. In the 2010s, it should present less of a problem than 20 years ago to (re-) introduce post-Marxist social theory into Central and Eastern European archaeology. With a little help from some Western siblings, maybe this will be the journal to achieve it?

Reference

- REBAY-SALISBURY, K., SØRENSEN, M. L. S., HUGHES, J. (eds.) 2010: *Body parts and bodies whole*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.