

Before Farming Editorial: Foraging further afield

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The concept of 'hybrid vigour' comes to mind when looking at the contents of this combined issue of *Before Farming*. A quick glance at the list of associate editors, book reviews and the news section reveals the revised intellectual and geographical scope of the journal, reflecting the change of title, with more inclusive wording, to: 'Before Farming: the archaeology and *anthropology* of hunter-gatherers.' I stress the anthropology because it had been our intention from the start to include the cultural/social anthropology of hunter-gatherers. The feedback we received from cultural anthropologists following the launch of the journal expressed both optimism and disappointment. There was an initial flurry of optimism that at last a vehicle existed for the dissemination of current research among hunter-gatherer specialists, but this was soon followed by disappointment that the focus of the journal seemed to be purely archaeological, and Old World in outlook. The makeup of the board of associate editors confirmed this suspicion - all of us being archaeologists, though some of us were brought up in the North American four-field tradition of archaeology as a sub-set of anthropology. To remedy the archaeological bias of the journal, we have expanded the range of associate editors to include Professor Alan Barnard who will help develop our coverage of contemporary issues in hunter-gatherer research whilst keeping the interests of archaeologists in mind. We will be looking to appoint another cultural anthropologist in the near future to strengthen our representation of the field.

A book review and the news feature in this issue are the first devoted to current development issues facing hunter-gatherers in the Philippines and in the central Kalahari. I would like to see research on contemporary hunter-gatherers feature among our main articles as a matter of course rather than as notable exceptions. There is room here for the present as well as the past, but our emphasis is always likely to be archaeological. Given the dwindling numbers of people who still live as hunter-gatherers - the depressing news from the central Kalahari confirms this - the future for the field lies primarily with our interpretations of the archaeological record.

In a related development, we have also appointed a dedicated rock art editor with Sven Ouzman (Berkeley). Rock art research straddles the archaeological and anthropological and is often the vehicle which integrates the two fields' interests in cosmology, iconography and cognition more generally. Paul Taçon (Australian Museum) with his varied research in archaeology and anthropology also embodies the fusion of the two disciplines, and his addition as an associate editor gives us a voice from the continent of hunter-gatherers.

The geographical scope of the journal has broadened, also in response to feedback from readers and as a result of discussion among the editorial board. We have dropped Old World from the title (the term seems to have a muddled meaning anyway, with various understandings of just what constitutes its geographical boundaries) which opens the scope of coverage to all hunter-gatherer societies, from all areas of the globe and across all time periods. Potential contributors should remember the broad audience - archaeological and anthropological - and aim to situate their research in the context of wider methodological and interpretive issues, as well as from a regional perspective. Professor John Speth (Michigan) has joined as an associate editor to help generate submissions from North American colleagues, but he also shares research interests

with some of us working in the Old World. We will also be looking to appoint a South American associate editor, and will be featuring papers later in 2003 from an upcoming conference in Chile (see below).

Before discussing briefly the contents of the current issue, I should mention that the 'Before Farming' component of our name also came under critical scrutiny. Some felt it was too restrictive temporally and unintentionally promoted an outmoded progressivist construct of cultural evolution harking back to Tylor and Morgan. A more subtle reading of the term 'before' gives the meanings of 'in front of' as well as 'in the presence of' farming. This sleight of mind extends the intellectual umbrella of *Before Farming* to cover contemporary hunter-gatherers as well as historic and prehistoric interactions between foragers and farmers.

Food and affordances

This combined issue contains four papers that resulted from the ninth international conference on hunter-gatherer societies (CHAGS 9) which was held in Edinburgh in September 2002. We are grateful to Marek Zvelebil and Malcolm Lillie, who arranged the session on diet and demography in which these papers were first presented, for letting us include them here. Subsequent issues in 2003 will contain further contributions from this session. The use of stable isotopes in the modelling of hunter-gatherer diets will feature in many of the forthcoming papers, and Bailey and Milner lead with a lucid discussion of the methodological challenges that face archaeologists as we integrate traditional sources of paleodiet data (eg, faunal assemblages) with stable isotope analyses. The two sources of information can reflect very different patterns of accumulation, one long-term and coarse-grained the other short-term and at the scale of the individual. They draw attention to the apparent disjuncture between the archaeological evidence in northwestern Europe for continuity of marine food consumption from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic, especially in Denmark, and the isotopic evidence which suggest that marine foods were not a significant part of the diets of early farmers. The authors highlight the various biases, methodological and historical, that condition our perception of the Mesolithic/Neolithic transition and ultimately our interpretation of dietary data. In our second article, Clive Bonsall and his co-authors offer a speculative model that draws attention to a conspicuous gap in the dating of Mesolithic settlement along the Danube, and in particular in the Iron Gates region. Climate change in the mid-Holocene seems to be to blame with repeated flooding making life along the Danube difficult for hunter-gatherers and also for early farming communities who were then spreading into southeastern Europe. The substantial Mesolithic settlement of Lepenski Vir with its well known carved boulders is the only site in the Iron Gates to persist through the flood phase. Its continued use and elaboration may have been an ideological response by local Mesolithic communities to the challenge of the river.

In the third article, Brian Hayden takes a wide ranging look at the ethnographic and archaeological evidence for feasting among hunter-gatherers and its implications for the development of social complexity. He observes that communal feasting is rare among generalised foragers with low population densities, immediate return economies, and fluctuating resources. By contrast, feasting features among logistically organised hunter-gatherers with high population densities, delayed return economies and reliable and predictable food resources. A food surplus is essential for staging feasts and among complex or transegalitarian hunter-gatherers, feasting creates and cement alliances, as well establishing networks of obligation which can be manipulated to the social (and demographic) advantage of the host family or corporate group. Hayden looks at the wider evolutionary implication of structured feasting and argues that its advent lies at the root of profound social changes, linked to population growth, that began sometime in the Upper Palaeolithic in Europe and later elsewhere. This is a timely reflection as this season of celebratory feasting draws to a gluttonous peak.

Lars Larsson, in the fourth paper from CHAGS 9, examines evidence from the late Mesolithic of southern Sweden for the incorporation of food into mortuary rituals. The theme of feasting is echoed here, along with

evidence for individual variability in the treatment of the dead and the dying. Larsson looks at the placement of concentrations of fish (and species composition) in relation to the body and finds evidence for food consumed by the dying as well as offerings made to the dead. The role of fish in mortuary rituals appears to be complex. Larsson argues that fish are not just the obvious choice of offering to the dead of a coastal community, but they mark the transition to the watery underworld of the spirits in a three-tiered cosmos. This metaphysical interpretation, dare I say it, gives us food for thought.

The final paper by Downey and Domínguez-Rodrigo departs from the food-based theme and offers a model of seasonal landscape use by early Acheulean foragers in the Lake Natron basin, northern Tanzania. Palaeoecological data derived from the immediate region provide the background for predicting hominid group movements in relation to variables or affordances including availability of water, meat (hunted or scavenged), raw materials (including wood) for tool making and risks posed by predators. The resulting model is testable archaeologically and preliminary results suggest a very different pattern of land use to that emerging from similar research at Olduvai Gorge. The model is of potential use to archaeologists working in later periods and other regions in Africa (or tropics in general) and as such it offers a counterbalance to the primarily European focus of the CHAGS papers.

Looking ahead

This is the first issue of *Before Farming* for which we are charging a subscription. As an incentive to entice you and your institution to subscribe we include in the price:

- access to this combined issue
- the print compilation version for 2002
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Issues in 2003 will contain more papers from CHAGS 9, including other sessions, as well as a series of papers on the theme of ‘exploring relationships through rock art: colonialism, landscape and ecology’ edited by Paul Faulstich, Paul Taçon and Sven Ouzman. The emphasis will be on the art of Australia, but with comparative contributions from southern Africa and Bolivia. Later in the year, we will be publishing some of the papers from the 51st Congreso Internacional de Americanistas to be held in Santiago, Chile. Included will be contributions on the European Mesolithic alongside those on prehistoric hunter-gatherers of South America from Colombia to Patagonia. We also have research articles in preparation on the northern European Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, the Palaeolithic of India, and a review of the past decade of archaeological research in Australia.

There is much to look forward to and I hope cultural anthropologists will make their interests felt as well. Hybrids show a marked capacity for growth and we are preparing the ground for the expansion of the journal to support the broad interests of those involved with hunter-gatherers, past and present.