



*Detail of a cast bronze ring-handle (Moravské zemské muzeum, Brno, inv. no. 107.160) found in 1941 with other fittings during the construction of marshalling yards at Brno-Malomerice 'na Plížich', Moravia; the area contained at least 86 flat graves. The 16 mounts – probably for a wooden spouted jug – are typical of what Paul Jacobsthal named in his seminal *Early Celtic Art* (Oxford University Press, 1944) the 'Plastic' style – in the German sense of *plastisch* or 'sculpted' – and are typical of the La Tène B2 phase (from about 270 BC) of the Central European Iron Age. Similar representations of animals and humans have a scattered distribution from Jutland to the Balkans, evidence of the far-spread nature of Iron Age society in the period. More recently this disparate group of objects has been dubbed the (Walt) 'Disney' style of abstraction due to the cartoon-like manner of the reduction of natural forms to a series of geometric shapes. An intriguing if scarcely credible theory is that the Brno-Malomerice mounts were made as a kind of astronomical map centred on the Celtic summer festival of Beltane. The head of the bird, which measures 32mm, has been identified as that of a African flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber roseus*), a common visitor to much of Europe and found as far afield as the Orkneys. Thanks to Jana Cizmárová, scientific officer at the Museum, the opportunity to study the Brno-Malomerice bronzes occurred in June 2004 during a visit to Brno as part of the collection of material for a supplement to *Early Celtic art*. The image was taken in the museum by J.V.S. Megaw using a Pentax ist D camera with a Pentax 1:2.8 100mm macro lens employing standard tungsten lights (vincent.megaw@flinders.edu.au).*



*Rock engravings from the site Mikro Souli – Nea Fili, on Mt Pagaeon in northern Greece. The engravings are part of a larger rock art complex encompassing Mts Pagaeon, Lekani and Menikio. So far 94 open-air panels have been recorded, comprising 1218 figures, though more are likely to exist. It is thought that this rock art tradition is associated with the Paeonian and Thracian tribes and dates from the Early Iron Age (which begins in this area in the first half of the eleventh century BC). The Thracians and Paeonians comprised a number of autonomous tribes that inhabited this area in prehistory. Homer refers to them as ‘ippopoli’ (Iliad 13,4), horsemen, reputedly famous for their war-like character. The Macedonian king Philip II conquered this area in 356 BC whereupon the indigenous tribes were gradually assimilated into the Greek world. The image was taken by Stella Pilavaki on 12 December 2005 using a Sony DSC-V1, 5.0 Mega Pixels fitted with a Carl Zeiss lens, shutter speed 10/1600 sec, focal length 7.6mm, max aperture value f/2.8 (stellapil@yahoo.com).*

# EDITORIAL

☞ The so-called Staffordshire (or Hammerwich) hoard continues to baffle all that see it, even after lengthy seminars, and it is my earnest hope that *Antiquity* will soon be in a position to present our readers with a sober account of what we know so far. Meanwhile here is a brief synopsis. The hoard was first discovered on 5 July 2009 near Hammerwich on the Staffordshire border in England by a metal-detectorist, Terry Herbert, who reported it after a further five days rootling. The site was then subjected to archaeological investigation by Birmingham Archaeology, in which speed and secrecy were the order of the day, apparently to avoid the attention of ‘nighthawks’. The site was then declared ‘sterile’, i.e. it had no more gold, but a context for its burial remained elusive. The hoard is eccentrically composed of least 165 sword parts, including 84 pommels, a cheek piece and crest from helmets, three gold crosses, a strip carrying a Latin quote from Moses (*‘Rise up O Lord, and may thy enemies be dispersed and those that hate you flee from your face’*) and other pieces amounting to more than 1500 items, comprising 5kg of gold and 1.3kg of silver. There were no coins, no blades, no spears and no dress-fittings or brooches. From its familiar Style II ornament the hoard dates broadly to the seventh or eighth century and its best parallels are from the south-east, where most of Britain’s cloisonné goldwork has been found to date.

What this heap of metal was doing in a ploughed field is anyone’s guess, and there has been some ingenious speculations: it was a cache of broken weapons gathered after a somewhat upmarket battle; it was the tropheum of a warrior’s life-time achievement; it was a votive deposit from pagans to their warlike gods; it was the scrap of a metalsmith, who was no doubt expecting a big order for pommels; it was a gift from the obsequious East Angles to Penda of Mercia; and (my favourite) it was a bunch of weapons and military crosses laid on the altar at Lichfield, subsequently pillaged by the Vikings who hurried north discarding unwanted loot until they were obliged to stop and bury the rest in the topsoil, because they could see Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians, bearing down on them from over the hill. For others, and they have my sympathy, the collection resembles a job-lot from a Treasure Hunter’s car boot sale.

Metal-detecting in Britain is legal if you have the permission of the landowner who generally likes to share the proceeds<sup>1</sup>. The British metal-detecting fraternity is not a clandestine gang like your *tombaruoli*, but a community of slightly teccy devotees, with an addictive hobby and its own monthly magazine, like angling. It gets you out of the house at weekends into the wide open country, for long searches broken up by the occasional meeting by the hedge to share a tin of sandwiches with other pundits. And like anglers, these hunters admire their quarries and generally know what they talking about.

After the curtain of secrecy was swept aside, caution was thrown to the winds and the whole event subjected to months of hyperbole. Readers may be puzzled to know that while other countries throw their Treasure Hunters into gaol or shoot them, in Britain we hand them a million pounds and make them into celebrities. Although this certainly has the

<sup>1</sup> The committee of independent advisors have deemed the Treasure to be worth £3.285 million. This figure will be split equally between the finder (Terry Herbert) and the landowner (Fred Johnson). The hoard is summarised at [www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk](http://www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk).



Items from the Hammerwich hoard (courtesy of the British Museum).

desired effect of getting discoveries declared, the publicity has now romanced Treasure Hunting into something a lot more interesting than archaeology – and by implication more democratic. The scientific study of the site so far was represented by a few unflattering clips on YouTube, and the assertion that there was nothing there: no box, no bag, no textile, no leather, no ditch, no hole in the ground. The objects took all the limelight. It's as though archaeology has gone by the board and we're gearing up for the next reality TV series: Britain's got Bullion. The press hailed the discovery as 'magical', 'fabulous,'

'phenomenal', and gleefully cited Terry Herbert's own – clearly effective – spell: '*spirits of yesteryear, take me where the coins appear*'. Even serious scholars caught the bug and behaved like Hollywood stars on Oscar night, their eyes brimming with tears. Museums squared up to each other to acquire the treasure, like the rivals for Tolkien's ring.

None of this should surprise us. After all, this is a nation with an average reading age of 9, which thinks vampires, hobbits and muggles are real, and the Dark Age was one long orgy of violence. Matters such as 'did history actually happen?' are not likely to be of much interest to people who can watch a six-hour epic about talking trees. Adult mysteries – such as the curse of avarice, the call of love and the cause of war – have been put away in favour of more childish things.

Thinking about sites that apparently have nothing in them reminds me of digging a cropmark site in Shropshire that remained maddeningly elusive after shovelling off the topsoil and a prolonged scraping of the clay subsoil that lay beneath it. By chance, a shadow of one of the ditches appeared in section, and solved the mystery – the cropmark was contained in the ploughsoil. Geophysical expert Immo Trinks<sup>2</sup> of the Swedish National Heritage Board has been collecting examples of these 'ghost' sites and divides them into three kinds. In the first, like my Shropshire site, the anomaly is detected by aerial reconnaissance or geophysics, but is retained physically only in the topsoil where it remains as a kind of 'soil sausage'. This seems to have been the case with the georadar survey conducted in December 2008 near the medieval monastery of St Olof in Skänninge, Sweden. In a second type, also known from Sweden, prehistoric ditches that never cut the subsoil nevertheless left their drainage pattern there – subsequently picked up by a geophysical survey sensitive to differences in water content. In a third example, a set of row graves in Bavaria was seen in an air photograph. Magnetic survey didn't find these but saw ring ditches with central graves instead. And excavation found neither. However, the site was left open and the ring ditches (but no graves) appeared after two weeks.

<sup>2</sup> trinks@gmail.com. My grateful thanks to Immo for information about his researches.

☞ We certainly have a lot to learn about the strata we study, and there is much science waiting to help us. Readers should watch out for increased sophistication from radar time-slicing, whereby deposits are mapped at 20cm vertical intervals (see for example Laurence Conyers' in *Antiquity's* March 2010 issue<sup>3</sup>). Excavators will also be following the development of on-site micro-technologies, whereby excavated house floors are mapped by their chemical and physical properties, and so show up areas used for washing and dyeing textiles, for sleeping, for eating, or for storage<sup>4</sup>. A 2009 paper extended the range of detectables to include lipids i.e. the insoluble decay products of organic compound<sup>5</sup>. The researchers plotted the organic traces on the floor of a reconstructed house at Lejre in Denmark, noting areas enriched with coprostanol and 24-ethylcoprostanol; compounds that could be directly associated with 'faecal biomarkers for herbivores' – or cowpats, as we mainstream archaeologists say.

For on-site physical sensing, magnetic susceptibility has been emerging into the limelight, especially for cave sequences. Andy Herries is one its champions, and at Pinnacle Point, South Africa, has used it to show how a ring of stones can make a hearth (they were magnetised in the same direction after heating); to distinguish occupation layers amongst the naturally laid (they are more magnetic); and, by using the magnetic properties of their sources, to provenance ochre, the Middle Stone Age's colorant of choice<sup>6</sup>.



NIR (Near Infrared) gun – the 4engr company's Phazir handheld material analyser. This kind of instrument has been used in Sweden to detect bone, textile and Vitamin C (e.g. from fruit) in sections. Sources: gun: <http://www.4engr.com/product/catalog/12415/index1.html>; section: editor.

These physical and chemical methods are stretching field archaeology into the territory of CSI and beyond. The old familiar idea of the 'context' begins to look rather crude, since the loci of chemical and physical properties overflow its supposed boundaries. The new prescriptions lead us slowly towards a brave new world where the donkey jacket is replaced by the white coat, and the status of our subject rises accordingly.

☞ For many years we have been publishing 'Retrospects' – and hope to do so for many more years yet. These structured reminiscences give pleasure to writer and reader alike, and form a series of first hand witness statements about the archaeology of our time. We now propose to start a new series that looks forward rather than back, focusing on the role and status of archaeology, in the academy and in the profession and in the tangled network that connects the two. These **Prospects** deal with the state of this union (or disunion) in

<sup>3</sup> *Antiquity* 84: 175-84.

<sup>4</sup> Karen Milek of Aberdeen University undertook a major review incorporating new work in Iceland in her Cambridge University dissertation. See Milek, K.B. 2006. Houses and households in early Icelandic society: geoarchaeology and the interpretation of social space. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge.

<sup>5</sup> B. Hjulstro & S. Isaksson. 2009 Identification of activity area signatures in a reconstructed Iron Age house by combining element and lipid analyses of sediments. *Journal of Archaeological Science* 36 (2009): 174-83

<sup>6</sup> Herries, A.I R. 2009 New approaches for integrating palaeomagnetic and mineral magnetic methods to answer archaeological and geological questions on Stone Age sites, in A. Fairbairn, S. O'Connor & B. Marwick (ed.) *New directions in archaeological science* (Terra Australis 28): 235-54.

different continents and will be published in *Debate*, and debate is what they are hoping to attract. Items on the agenda in these 3000-word essays are archaeology as an intellectual endeavour, as a discipline, as a practice; its future in the restless economic transmogrifications affecting the universities, in the thinking of anthropologists, historians, and sociologists; its principles of cultural resource management, the research yield of mitigation, the prospects of our students who earn their living in it, the transferability of thinkers between the two, archaeology's role as an instrument of state, as a player in the market, as communal therapy. We know, without asking, that these things will be different everywhere we go, but it's time we built up a picture from local reports rather than guesswork. So please don't wait to be asked, the editor will welcome contributions from any part of the world at any time, and don't be afraid to give speculation free rein. Our discipline has never been finding so much, understanding so much, or being useful to so many; nor has it ever been so out of touch with the societies in which it lives and which it lives off. That makes a perilous future. Let's confront it with some role-definition and crystal ball gazing.

🔍 Readers, authors and peer-reviewers will be pleased to know that we are about to introduce an *online submission and tracking* system. Papers will be submitted online where authors will also be able to track the progress of their submission themselves. Papers will be peer-reviewed using an online form. The new system involves no more technology than we are used to in email, is 100% confidential and should be very much quicker, more transparent and more secure than anything we have tried before. Is it worth it? We won't know immediately, but the adoption is in logical line with our policy. We try to provide authors with a service that is swift, decisive and fair, in order to serve their career interests. We try to provide readers with articles that are up-to-date, accessible and eye-opening. We try to provide reviewers with the facility to offer their opinions easily, transparently and unfussily as part of their busy lives (and we are (all of us) deeply appreciative of the service they do for the whole academy). The new system should enhance all these objectives. Detailed help and instructions will be available throughout the submission and review process as well as on our website. Users are also welcome to email us or telephone for assistance. Of one thing we can assure all our colleagues and supporters and users; however much we employ the technologies of the future, we shall never abandon the old-fashioned courtesies that make archaeology worth doing and the business of disseminating knowledge of the past around the world as much a pleasure as a duty.

🏆 The Antiquity prize for the best article in 2009 has been awarded to M.B. Hebsgaard, M.T.P. Gilbert, J. Arneborg, P. Heyn, M.E. Allentoft, M. Bunce, K. Munch, C. Schweger and E. Willerslev for “‘The Farm Beneath the Sand’ – an archaeological case study on ancient ‘dirt’ DNA”. This year's Ben Cullen prize was won by Charles and Thomas Higham for ‘A new chronological framework for prehistoric Southeast Asia, based on a Bayesian model from Ban Non Wat’. E.-J. Lee et al.'s article on Eung Tae's tomb and E. Huysecom et al. on the emergence of pottery in Africa were worthy runners-up. The photographic prize was won by Chris Doyal for his image of underwater archaeology off Haserot Beach, Michigan.

Martin Carver  
York, 1 June 2010