correlates of rates of cultural innovation and transmission is also widely used elsewhere. Churchill's treatment, however, provides both an examination of the ecological causes of low population density and an archaeological analysis of its ramifications. As such, it provides one of the more comprehensive groundings of what remains a largely theoretical argument. In this context, it is also pleasing to note Churchill's contention, supported by increasingly abundant evidence, that Neanderthals were cognitively capable of producing essentially 'modern' material culture, but that their population densities prevented them from doing so for long periods of time. The evidence presented for increasing archaeological site densities in the later Mousterian provides a viable explanation as to why the more impressive cultural and symbolic expressions of the Neanderthal adaptation occurred primarily during this period, when our own ancestors were already at the gates of Europe.

Thin on the ground will certainly not end the debate on the causes of Neanderthal extinction. As with any valuable academic contribution, it will do quite the opposite. There will be many who disagree with this particular take on the great Neanderthal extinction debate. Regardless of whether one agrees with Churchill's thesis, it is impossible to argue that it is anything but logically and rigorously constructed. The arguments of *Thin on the ground* are made on the basis of extensive evidence and considerable scholarship. This book should serve both as a comprehensive introduction to the debate and as a timely stimulus to new research.

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GRAEME BARKER (ed.). *Rainforest foraging and farming in Island Southeast Asia*. (The archaeology of the Niah Caves, Sarawak 1). xx+410 pages, 279 colour and b&w illustrations, 60 tables. 2013. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research; 978-1-902937-54-0 hardback £62.

This volume is the first of two that describe the results from fieldwork at the Niah Caves in Sarawak (north Borneo). The present volume provides an account of past human activity within the cave system, while the second will provide a detailed review of fieldwork from 1954–2004. As a cave with a well-preserved, well-dated and near continuous record of human activity spanning *c.* 50 000 years, the authors are able to interrogate burning archaeological questions about the human history of this region. A primary research aim is to re-examine the transition between foraging and farming, and the extent to which 'Neolithic' arrivals revolutionised the natural and cultural environment. Other research aims are to assess the antiquity of human activity in the wider region and to establish the extent to which Pleistocene human communities adapted to new rainforest environments. Although not specified as a research aim, the volume also examines the gradual emergence of behavioural modernity, including symbolic behaviour, throughout the Pleistocene and Holocene periods, as well as the nature and chronology of 'Neolithic' and 'metal age' human communities.

The preface and first two chapters provide context for the Niah Project, describing the site as: "a series of enormous—veritably cathedral-like interconnected caverns" (p. xvii), before exploring previous research at these caves and unresolved research questions for the region's (pre)history. The introductory chapters provide a wonderful—often whimsical—historical narrative, reinforced by excellent illustrations, about a largely undocumented period of archaeological research in Borneo. Genuine respect is shown for past researchers, whose data are integrated with skill and sophistication throughout the volume. Tom Harrison, who excavated at the site in the 1950s and 1960s, appears at the heart of many an outrageous story and is described by David Attenborough as "explorer, museum curator, guerrilla fighter, pioneer, sociologist, documentary film maker [. . .] arrogant, choleric, swashbuckling, often drunk, and nearly always outrageous" (p. 9)!

Chapters 3–8 provide results from the recent excavations (2000–2004) within the Niah Caves

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complex. This includes the data-rich Chapter 3, which assesses complex stratigraphy and associated site chronology and climate history. Subsequent chapters provide a chronological narrative (terminal Pleistocene to late Holocene) of human activity in the Niah Caves, with results presented alongside thoughtful interpretation of regional significance. This is particularly true for Chapters 4, 7 and 8, which afford remarkable insight into how the hominids at Niah behaved. For example, in Chapter 7, the authors use an impressive range of archaeological data (including strontium analysis, burial practices/positions, lithic residues and petrographic analysis of ceramics) to argue for the use of the Niah Caves by multiple human communities, with segregated areas for the living and the dead. The authors identify complexities that do not fit with the Austronesian voyager-farmer model, suggesting instead gradual change throughout the terminal Pleistocene and Holocene and the selective integration of a Neolithic 'package'. Arguably, the most fascinating results in the volume surround human activity during the late Holocene. Burial practices, grave goods, ceramics and lithics are used to demonstrate human individuality, community affiliation and "multiple or shifting trade alliances" (p. 339) with people as far away as India and China.

Should there be any weakness to this volume it is the repetition of information. The majority of the chapters are self-contained narratives incorporating broad arrays of context and discussion that make for rewarding reading; this format, however, also means that sizable chunks of information from Chapter 3 (e.g. chronology, environment history, stratigraphy) reappear in some of the later chapters. Nonetheless, such repetition detracts little considering the quantity of information that the volume provides, the accessibility of its writing style and the wider contribution of each chapter. The authors have successfully collated, condensed and interpreted the Niah Caves excavations, providing remarkable insights into the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Borneo and its broader implications for world (pre)history.

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D.T. POTTS. *Nomadism in Iran: from antiquity to the modern era*. xxv+558 pages, 21 b&w illustrations, 5 tables. 2014. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 978-0-19-933079-9 hardback £55.

The author's agenda in this important and interesting, but flawed, book is clear:

In setting out, over five years ago, to chart the development of nomadism in Iran [my] *goal was to demonstrate two things: first, the spurious nature of the evidence underpinning the claim that Iranian nomadism was a phenomenon of great antiquity that can be identified in the archaeological record of the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, and Bronze Age in Luristan, Khuzestan, and Fars; and second, the ahistorical (even anti-historical) naiveté of underestimating the extent to which all nomadic groups in Iran have been subjected to such profoundly transformational forces that any assumption of behavioural continuity between groups observed in the twentieth century and those of antiquity must be viewed with considerable skepticism* (p. 419).

This book, in short, aims to refute what has been for at least half a century the standard archaeological view of nomadism in Iran—that full-time, transhumant pastoral nomadism has been present in the region for somewhere between four and eight thousand years. In contrast, Potts argues that "nomadism is a comparatively late introduction which can only be understood within the context of particular political circumstances" (p. xiv) and concludes that "there is no evidence suggesting that the pattern of nomadism as practiced in the twentieth century pre-dates the Oghuz infiltration in the eleventh century" (p. 427). The standard view, Potts argues, is based on slipshod interpretations of ambiguous archaeological data and mistakenly applies analogies derived from ethnographic and personal observations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nomads to archaeological data of vastly greater antiquity.

Potts is absolutely correct in pointing out that, when the available data are examined critically, there is scant evidence in the archaeological record for the presence of what he defines as true nomads. Too many

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