A grave recently excavated at Estark-Joshaqan, Iran. Dated to the Iron Age II (c. 1000–800 BC), it contained both regular (primary and secondary) inhumations, and the cremains of at least 13 individuals, suggesting a complex character of burial customs in that period (for further information, see Hosseinzadeh et al. *in October's Project Gallery).*

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Archaeological site CHCP-12, located on the edge of the Dasht-i-Margo ('Desert of Death') in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Visible in the foreground of this image is the top of a large enclosure wall behind which protrudes a large tepe *with a series of smaller walls on its summit. Photograph: M.A. Abramiuk (for further information, see Abramiuk in October's Project Gallery).*

EDITORIAL

Archaeology takes the long view: that is one of the things that distinguishes it from history. Many of us (prehistorians in particular) deal with dates ending in multiple zeros that can easily confuse the uninitiated. The spans of time are vast, the evidence challenging and the pace of change, for much of that timescale, seemingly very slow. How far that impression is caused by taphonomy—the further back we look, the less there is to go on—and how far by the conservative nature of small-scale societies is a good question. There is no doubt about the gathering pace of change as we approach the present, however, and that is hardly surprising given the ballooning size of human populations. Twenty-first-century technology does not make us cleverer, but there are more of us around to invent things.

Archaeology and the future

We are very good at looking backwards, but how about looking forwards? Can archaeology tell us what human societies will be like in the future? We have several million years of human evolution and material culture to guide us, and a mountain of data about human social organisation during the past few millennia. Archaeology encapsulates societies both literate and illiterate, those before and after the adoption and spread of writing. A well-known publication of the 1950s held that 'history begins at Sumer'[1]; archaeology has a much longer story to tell. It also provides direct access to communities caught up in asymmetrical relationships, to the colonised as well as the colonisers, the ruled as well as the rulers. And it does, or should, confront and contest a Eurocentric or Western interpretation of the human past.

Archaeology began to devise global narratives to encapsulate all of this diversity in the nineteenth century. Lewis Henry Morgan's stages of savagery, barbarism and civilisation were adopted and subdivided by Gordon Childe 70 years later. In the 1960s, Elman R. Service proposed a division of societies into 'bands', 'tribes', 'chiefdoms' and 'states', while Morton Fried offered egalitarian societies, rank societies, stratified societies and the state. Those categories, too, could be (and have been) projected onto the past. They do not necessarily imply human 'progress', that 'bands' and 'tribes' are in any way inferior to 'chiefdoms' and 'states', although the spectre of 'progressivism' inevitably haunts these broad-brush approaches.

It goes without saying that breadth of coverage is, and has always been, a key element of *Antiquity*'s mission. In founding the journal back in 1927, O.G.S. Crawford famously announced that "our field is the Earth, our range in time a million years or so, our subject the human race"[2]. It is a sentiment that has been promoted by *Antiquity* editors ever since.

[1] Kramer, S.N. 1956. *History begins at Sumer*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
[2] Crawford, O.G.S. 1927. Editorial notes. *Antiquity* 1: 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00000016

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Articles in this issue range from Palaeolithic Europe and south-west Asia (the Bergkamen bone point; Natufian burials from Raqefet Cave) through to the Early Modern period (the Caribbean 'idol' from the Pigorini collection; flaked glass tools in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego). We get there by way of Zanzibar, Belize, Colombia, Egypt and the Mediterranean.

But, to return to our theme, how about looking forwards? Are archaeologists uniquely equipped to contemplate the future? It would be nice to think so. And we have recently been offered one such perspective. In *The fifth beginning*, Robert L. Kelly[3] first takes us through "four main times of change, times that introduce significant shifts in the material signature of human history and in the organization of human life": the first tools, modern humans, agriculture and states. But he then asks whether the pace of change over the past five centuries is heralding a similar major shift, a 'fifth beginning'.

Kelly takes an avowedly optimistic view of the future. Each of the previous four beginnings has been marked by new kinds of cooperation: "pair-bonding, sharing, alliances, trade". So, in the same way, the fifth beginning should produce new ways of working together. Globalisation, the arms race and the spread of capitalism may seem like problems rather than solutions, but perhaps, after all, they will usher in positive change. The long view teaches us to be more hopeful about the future: "Poverty, racism, sexism, climate change, jihad—some days the problems facing humanity seem insurmountable. But an archaeological perspective on six million years of human evolution tells us that the way things are today is not the way things always will be. The combined effect of capitalism, war, and global communications are producing world citizens"[4].

It is an encouraging perspective, and a step away from the gloomy prognoses that dominate the media and current events. Kelly's is one of several recent books exploring archaeology's contribution to social and environmental issues, with varying degrees of optimism (see our New Book Chronicle in the recent August issue). But it sketches only one of the possible futures awaiting us, and the archaeological auspices could be read differently. Through technology and innovation, we have discovered how to support ever larger populations, but whether we will learn to live together in greater harmony as resources are stretched ever further is more of a poser. And will the impact of technology continue to be positive, or will artificial intelligence push many people towards powerlessness and poverty?[5] From stone-tipped arrows to AI, humanity has been endlessly inventive and spectacularly successful in many ways. Do we now need to protect ourselves from the consequences?

Big History

It is interesting to speculate on how future archaeologists will look back at the computer age. The hardware is fragile, although enough will probably survive to show how it worked. The software, on the other hand, has a more uncertain long-term future, and the vast archives of digitised documents are very unlikely to survive. We may become like the Indus

[3] Kelly, R.L. 2016. *The fifth beginning: what six million years of human history can tell us about our future*. Oakland: University of California Press.
[4] Kelly, *The fifth beginning*, p. 121.
[5] Hern, A. 2016. Stephen Hawking: AI will be 'either best or worst thing' for humanity. *The Guardian*, 19 October 2016. Available at: http://bit.ly/2etEj7b (accessed 1 August 2017).

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civilisation, where there is no doubt that writing was used, but most of it has long since disappeared. A seminal article published in *Antiquity* two decades ago made the same point with regard to China: the fact that most of the surviving texts are about divining the future does not necessarily imply that it was invented for that alone. There is little question that the Shang used writing for administrative and commercial purposes too[6].

These are all 'big picture' issues, the kind that a global archaeology is amply equipped to illustrate. But archaeologists are not alone: there is now also 'Big History'. In *The fifth beginning*, Kelly decides early on to start not with the Big Bang, fourteen billion years ago, but with our branch of the evolutionary tree, the primate line. A very reasonable choice, but advocates of 'Big History' take an even longer view and do indeed begin with the Big Bang and the formation of the Earth.

'Big History' has been going now for over a decade, particularly since David Christian's *Maps of time* in 2004[7]. It integrates sciences and humanities in an attempt to create a single grand narrative ending at the present day. 'Big History' has recently become a project, a new way of teaching being advocated in schools, with support from Bill Gates. The objectives are set out in the preface to the second (2011) edition of *Maps of time*: "One of the most exciting features of big history is its inherently global nature. Within big history, human beings are encountered first as a single species, and only very late in such a survey do national or civilizational perspectives acquire salience. As a result, big history holds out the prospect of creating a genuinely global account of the past of humanity, one not bound to national perspectives, an account that, like good science, should work as well in Seoul or Delhi or Buenos Aires as in London or New York"[8].

'Big History' inevitably has both critics and admirers, but is this long-term global approach not what archaeologists have been working on for over a century? What about Morgan and Childe? Admittedly, 'Big History' starts further back in time, but the focus is on human societies, both literate and non-literate. *Maps of time* devotes three times as much space to the last seven million years as to the remoter past, and takes the reader chapter by chapter through the customary transitions: modern humans, agriculture, states. Is 'Big History' stealing our thunder? Perhaps there is room for dialogue here. We should be more vocal in showing what a rich narrative of the human past archaeology has to offer.

Peer review

All mainstream academic journals today rely on the good offices of peer reviewers, and journal editors are eternally grateful to those who spend time and trouble in advising and reporting on manuscripts submitted for publication. There has been much discussion about the effectiveness of the process. There have also been many debates about the merits of open *vs* blind and double-blind reviewing (where reviewers and/or authors are anonymous to the other party). For myself, after five years of editing *Antiquity*, I would say the process works

[6] Postgate, N., T. Wang & T. Wilkinson. 1995. The evidence for early writing: utilitarian or ceremonial? *Antiquity* 69: 459–80. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00081874

[7] Christian, D. 2004. *Maps of time: an introduction to big history*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

[8] Christian, D. 2011. *Maps of time: an introduction to big history* (second edition). Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

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The opening ceremony for the sculpture 'Monument to Anonymous Reviewer' *at the Higher School of Economics, National Research University, Moscow. (Reproduced courtesy of the HSE under a CC BY-ND-NC 4.0 licence.)*

well, and I am impressed by the care and quality of the peer review reports, which are valuable, of course, not only to the editorial team but also, we hope, as feedback to the authors. We may not always achieve it, but our intention, even when we have to decline papers, is that authors find peer review a helpful and constructive experience.

The contribution of peer reviewers has recently been recognised in monumental form at the Higher School of Economics at the National Research University in Moscow[9]. In May this year, a concrete cube dedicated to the 'Anonymous Peer Reviewer' was unveiled in front of the institute. Each side carries one of the familiar verdicts: 'Minor Changes', 'Major Changes', 'Revise and Resubmit', 'Reject'. 'Accept' is on the upper face. Igor Chirikov, the sociologist who launched the project, suggested that those awaiting a favourable outcome should rub the top of the block while saying 'Accept'. It is a great idea, not least in publicly recognising the hard work of the anonymous peer reviewers who are so vital to the academic process. Perhaps we should launch something similar, specifically for archaeology? A trilithon perhaps? Or a pyramid?

Chris Scarre
Durham, 1 October 2017

[9] Higher School of Economics. 2017. First ever monument to anonymous peer reviewer unveiled at HSE. Available at: http://bit.ly/2rxIhGB (accessed 1 August 2017).

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