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# **E**EDITORIAL

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This issue of the *European Journal of Archaeology* presents a series of articles that span a wide range of prehistory, from the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition to the Iron Age. It also neatly focuses on three of the recurring themes of much European archaeology; some of these themes are old, like the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition or the origins of social inequality, whereas others are relatively newer, like approaches to understanding gender differences. Thus although the case studies presented are western European, their relevance goes beyond their geographical location, to encompass our discourse as a whole.

In his final editorial, John Chapman drew attention to a gender imbalance in the articles published to that date in our Journal (2001b: 300), and it is refreshing to note that two of the three papers published in this issue have female authors, though the authors of two of the three articles are based in the UK and focus on data from Britain.

In another recent editorial, commenting on a paper on ‘Neolithic diet at the Brochtorff circle, Malta’ (Richards et al. 2001), John noted that stable isotope studies of human palaeodiet combined with AMS dates on human bones are ‘likely to revolutionize our perceptions of the subsistence basis of European communities over the next decade’ (Chapman 2001a: 164). In the first article in this issue, Rick Schulting and Michael Richards use such data to argue that early Neolithic people on the west coast of Scotland ‘turned their backs to the sea’, abandoning maritime food resources for agriculture and husbandry; they point out that their data for a rapid change in the subsistence base militates against views of the transition that are current in the literature. In reality such stable isotope studies are not new – as Schulting and Richards point out (pp. 165, 173), the technique was pioneered in the 1970s (Vogel and van der Merwe 1977) and first applied to the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition in Denmark over 20 years ago (Tauber 1981). However, in recent years the impact of such studies has increased rapidly – indeed in the last issue of *EJA*, an article by Clive Bonsall et al. uses stable isotope data to support a discussion of the role of climate change in the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition in north-west Europe (2002: 12–13).

While studies of the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition are the traditional stuff of European prehistory, gender is a relative newcomer and its impact on archaeological discourse varies over Europe. Beakers, as a phenomenon that interests much of the continent are however central to much archaeological discourse. Joanna Sofaer Derevenski uses the rich Beaker mortuary data from the Upper Thames Valley to

examine how male and female identities are constructed in different ways. She notes that whereas archaeology has tended to use a simple artefact–people equivalence as a tool for the gender interpretation of funerary contexts, in reality the difference between men and women was conceptual rather than purely based on artefacts.

Inés Sastre's paper on the Castro culture takes us away from Britain, to Iron Age north-west Spain. She discusses the widely-applied chiefdom model and offers us an alternative, non-functionalist interpretation of Castro culture social formation, denying the presence of overt inequalities in the archaeological record and preferring to see a classless agrarian segmentary society.

One of the tendencies she recognizes in work on the Iron Age has been the tendency to apply global models of Iron Age society without considering local particularities. In a sense it is this – and the fact that different archaeological traditions have different research agendas, different preoccupations and trajectories – that lies behind the debate between Nebelsick and Rowlands in the Reviews section. For many readers this will seem to be the re-fighting of battles fought 20 years ago, for others it will be of key significance – a measure of the variability that characterizes our 'pluriverse'. Although intertextuality – debate – is not new to the *EJA* (witness Knapp 2000 and Gale 2001), it is not the intention to go down this road, which can easily become stale and parochial. Diversity of approach, of interpretation, is the key to the success of *EJA*.

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