



## INTERDISCIPLINARIA ARCHAEOLOGICA

### NATURAL SCIENCES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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## A Window of Opportunity

Jaromír Beneš, Robert Brukner, Ondřej Mlejnek, Jaroslav Peška

One of the most unfortunate aspects of the global conflicts of the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century was that several generations of academics and researchers had little if any direct interaction with their peers across the political and ideological east/west divide. The natural ebb and flow of ideas, and professional cross-fertilisation that are characteristic of academic research were significantly impeded at the time. This, along with the weight of the prevailing state ideologies, and institutional (and personal) adaption to them, contributed much to a significant east/west divergence in theory, method, interests and overall approach within the social and natural sciences.

This divergence has only been partially rectified in the 20 years since the collapse of European totalitarian regimes in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In large measure archaeologists, on both sides of this unfortunate historic divide, still do not really understand one another. In many respects the divisions previously enforced by external political circumstance have become self-perpetuating, and relations remain marred by a host of mutual prejudices and misapprehensions.

To this day it is not uncommon to hear derisive comments quietly expressed in the common rooms and teacher lounges of Anglo-American universities about the professional and practice standards of “eastern” Europe universities and researchers. Conversely it is an exceptional circumstance indeed to find a western archaeologist in a career track academic position in an east European archaeology department, where it is generally accepted that westerners “don’t fit into our system”. It is difficult if not impossible to find each others’ literature and journals in our respective libraries, and there is an overreliance on a surprisingly small number of one-off “seminal reviews” about what is going on “over there”. Forty years of politicised language education has not helped matters either, and has left us with very few archaeologists able to bridge the language gap at a professional level in either direction.

Our journal strives to overcome this division, to increase professional interaction and to eliminate the self-perpetuating prejudices and misapprehensions. We want to open a window to the archaeology of the geographical centre and east of Europe; to provide the international community with a clear

view of the astounding breadth, depth and richness of the discipline here; and to provide an easily accessible forum for our archaeologists to display their innovative research and remarkable historical and archaeological contexts.

Given the vast extent of archaeological and related anthropological activity in the region, the researchers and institutions who have founded IANSA will largely focus on what we know and do best: illuminating approaches to archaeology grounded in scientific methods and cooperation with the natural sciences. We feel that this provides an excellent starting point to discuss and share archaeological perspectives.

### Who are we? What have we been up to?

Ripping a page straight out of post-processualist dogma, it really is all about your individual perspective. From our point of view, many of the countries in “eastern” Europe actually fall, historically and geographically, within central Europe together with notionally “western” countries like Germany and Austria. The Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia are in this category. Many of our contributors come from Ukraine and Russia, which along with Moldova, Belarus, Romania, and others, we consider eastern Europe. “East” European countries like those of the former Yugoslavia would fall into southern Europe along with Greece and Italy. East is not really east, west is not really west, and it can all be rather confusing. But the definitions are not fixed or formal, serve no useful function within the discipline, and do not facilitate archaeological analyses.

It should really come as no surprise that the history of these regions and the development of archaeology within them is extremely diverse and complex. In the Czech Republic as far back as 1786 antiquarians such as J. Dobrovský were involved in clearly archaeological pursuits. In Russia in 1718, Peter the Great initiated an Empire-wide policy to systematically collect ancient material remains, record their contexts and to conserve them in St. Petersburg – perhaps one of the earliest examples of cultural resource management. As early

as two centuries ago the natural sciences constituted what we might now think of as a surprisingly strong component of the archaeological mainstream. The innovations and experiments of these times are well known, to us: the three-age system of artefact dating, the broad interplay with geology and stratigraphy, the systematic research by naturalists into depositional processes of faunal remains, the body of knowledge that grew up around the investigations of lake shore prehistoric sites (*Phalbauten*) in the Alps, and the evolutionary theories from biology that informed our considerations of human physical and cultural development. Methodological developments in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were just as innovative, and the scope of analysis was expanding. The nascent discipline was as closely allied with the natural sciences in continental Europe, as it was in the USA and across the British Empire, if not more so.

In the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century archaeology was full of promise and expectation (Hart, Terrell 2002). But it was quickly channelled, in central and eastern Europe, into the search for national origins. It became concerned with uncovering and depicting the regional histories of great European nations, and the search for legitimacy and ethnic identity (Malina, Vašíček, Zvelebil 1990). The subsequent decline in engagement with the natural sciences, particularly between World War I and II, was almost universal. Scientific methods in archaeology were used sparsely, on a small scale, and very quietly. The natural sciences were effectively restricted to supporting investigations of unique finds, such as peat bog bodies, and research into human evolution. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also clearly a time of disciplinary divergence and autonomous development within both the natural sciences and archaeology, in our region.

The situation after WWII was very different, and by the 1960's archaeology was once again awash with cutting edge approaches and disciplinary advancement. Radiocarbon and geochronometric dating methods opened new avenues to re-defining established prehistories around the world. Scientific theories and methods fostered and defined the "New Archaeology" and processualism in the USA and Europe, much as the Soviet archaeology of half a century before (Trigger 1989). But technological capacity had increased enormously and many new techniques became available for dating and ordering the past, reconstructing past climates and environments, and analysing the physical and chemical properties of artefacts and plant, animal and human remains (Brothwell, Higgs eds. 1969). Central and east European archaeologists contributed to this renewed scientific renaissance in the discipline. In 1968, for example, Czech and Slovak botanists organised the first conference of the International Workgroup for Palaeoethnobotany (Jacomet, Kreuz 1999), out of which emerged the international journal *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany*.

While the level of interaction between the natural science and archaeology deepened globally, mainstream archaeology in continental Europe remained strongly influenced by cultural history and typology. This retarded the utilisation of scientific approaches, when compared to Anglo-American developments

of the time (Neustupný 1993). It was not until the revolutions of the late 80's and early 90's that the archaeology of eastern and central Europe was able to more fully explore and strengthen its collaboration with the natural sciences.

Throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the contribution made by anthropology and archaeology to higher level theory and interpretation of history, human development and culture also went in very separate directions. Deeply influenced by post-War political dynamics the discipline resolved itself into divergent streams variously favouring technological or economic determinism, historical materialism, and neo-Marxism. At its extremes, elements of British and US archaeology developed theories and approaches that reflected their deeply entrenched acceptance of *laissez-faire* idealism and the central values of conservative political ideology (Trigger 1989). Within totalitarian regimes politically enforced dialectical materialism and class-based economic analyses overwhelmed rational and open theoretical discourse. Archaeologists here also preferred to keep their heads down and concentrate on the material record.

After the revolutions of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the higher level theoretical considerations that pervaded Anglo-American archaeology were weighed and examined. But the sharp controversy between processual and post-processual, positivist and interpretive, clearly does resonate with archaeologists in this region (Kuna 1993). The post-processual critique is perceived as disciplinary infighting, and of no significant overall research value, though it has been understood as a corrective to the blind belief in the absolute power of scientific methodology.

In the last two decades several "mainstreams" have arisen within the discipline. Along with what is perceived as "common sense" archaeology – the structured collection of synchronic and diachronic evidence from sites and related cultures – there are many new and emerging subdisciplines. These are found at the juncture of archaeology and various natural sciences and include archaeobotany, archaeozoology, geoarchaeology or archaeometry. Within environmental archaeology, for example, it is increasingly clear that biological remains provide not only site-specific botanical data, but also insight into the complex relationship of the environment with the archaeological space. This in turn is providing key data, which at a cognitive level, opens up new possibilities for interpretation and explanation of cultural behaviours. As a result these new subdisciplines are strongly perceived, in central and east Europe, more as methodologically autonomous ways of approaching knowledge, than as services to the parent discipline – a notion now considered rather out of date.

## IANSa

This journal reflects our interest in showcasing the achievements, research and findings of archaeologists in Central and Eastern Europe as they exist today, and to dispel the myths and misunderstandings. We serve researchers and

scientists in the region who have a growing need to access an international journal focused on the methods of the natural sciences and multidisciplinary cooperation in archaeology.

Our goal is to become the journal of record for the archaeology of the region, to rank amongst the most cited European journals in archaeology, and to provide the premier forum for the publication of research from disciplines allied to archaeology in Central and Eastern Europe. We expect to draw our readership and contributors from the ranks of students, researchers, academics and scientists from across a broad range of archaeological and specialized natural science institutions that are in, or have an interest in, the archaeology of the region.

The content of the journal is divided into three parts. The *Articles* section includes substantive contributions of original scientific research, written to international academic publishing standards (inclusive of introductions, methodology, theories and reasoning, results, discussion, conclusion and scientific citations). The *News and Views* section includes excavation reports, case studies, unique finds and preliminary research results. Our *Reviews* section includes comments on recently published papers, book and article reviews, and occasional topics of special interest. The journal is strictly scientific, peer reviewed, and publishes only in English. A hardcopy of the journal will be issued semi-annually. Our articles, detailed information about our range of subject interests, and information for contributors are available at [www.iansa.eu](http://www.iansa.eu).

We believe that you will find within our pages much that will surprise and inspire. We also hope that you will find material of direct interest to your professional pursuits and

new opportunities for cooperation and interaction with your colleagues in the region. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and comments about our journal, individual articles and our work in the region. We welcome all submissions.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, and our founding supporters, we wish all our readers a rewarding and informative view, through our window, onto the vast landscape of Eastern and Central European archaeology.

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