

ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF ISLANDS

This volume of *Shima* presents a collection of seven articles that explore different dimensions of island cultures from an archaeological perspective. Together, the authors bring a variety of parameters into play, including physical v cultural interaction and isolation, innovation, conservatism, sense of place, social memory and identity; and question these concepts at different spatial and temporal scales. The case studies are drawn mostly from Europe, with a foray into the Indian Ocean, but the ideas presented here should resonate with researchers working in other parts of the world, both in archaeology and cognate disciplines. Over time, cultural interaction creates multiple layers of identity. The physical remains left behind by island communities contain vital clues regarding this process, which as archaeologists we seek to understand. Cultural interaction affects us all, but its effects can be amplified on islands, as discussed by the papers in this issue.

Nazou's paper opens the discussion with her study of cultural interaction, focusing on the complexity of mainland-islander relationships and exploring the variations and similarities in material culture in Attica (mainland Greece) and the surrounding islands. Her research highlights the importance of reconstructing maritime networks in order to identify the social circumstances that influence maritime identity. Berg's paper, also on island archaeology in Greece, makes the point that a new generation of studies and archaeological field surveys should focus on the sea in order to further our understanding of islands (both in Greece and beyond). Indeed, the idea of connectivity and engagement with the sea should not be taken for granted but archaeologically demonstrated. Barrowclough uses the concept of 'dry islands' to question the link between physical insularity and cultural isolation and to explain how "space and society are mutually constituted". He also demonstrates that island cultures can stretch beyond their terrestrial limits.

The subject of 'identity' is further investigated by Rennell, who explains how settlement location, inter-site journeys, and the creation of place within island environments may have acted as mechanisms for expressing and reinforcing social identity in the Iron Age Scottish islands. Driscoll's study of the Channel Islands and the re-use of monuments over time emphasises that it is crucial to identify the external influences upon island communities. By looking at exchange networks, he argues that external pressures may have been a catalyst for the reinforcement of island identity in the past. Dawson introduces new perspectives on the relationship between island settlement and island identity, by comparing prehistoric and modern examples and focusing on abandonment and displacement. She highlights the complexities of establishing when colonisers from the mainland may have actually begun to identify themselves as islanders, and asks what geographical scale different identities might be associated with. Seetah's paper brings several of these issues together in his discussion of post-colonial Mauritius. He explains how an island community has coped with its colonial legacy and the tensions emerging from its past, while at the same time emphasising its cultural richness.

The next issue of *Shima* (v4n2) includes further contributions to the expanding horizons of island archaeology, as seen through the islanders' connections to the wider world. Colls and Hunter's island survey project (on the Isle of Harris in the Western Scottish Isles) illustrates the benefits of working on islands and their potential in terms of identifying episodes of colonisation, abandonment, and connections with the wider world. Their paper provides a fine corollary to Daire's paper (in v3n2), which illustrated the rewards and challenges of working in the French islands. Both papers show how individual island studies provide the necessary building blocks for more comprehensive inter-island studies, leading to regional comparisons. The comparative angle is explored further in v4n2 by Copat, Danesi and Recchia, who discuss alternating phases of interaction and isolation between the Maltese islands and among the central Mediterranean islands. Their paper focuses on identifying evidence for interaction, cultural receptivity, reworking, autonomy, and the creation of new ideas.

Islands provide a formidable category for comparative discussion and, overall, the papers in this collection show that island cultures should be explored at multiple scales. As stated in *Shima*'s opening editorial, 'the long-term temporal perspective afforded by archaeology has a significant role to play in our appreciation of island cultures in the present. Equally, contemporary communities can shed light on the dynamics of past societies' (*Shima* 2007, v1n1: 3). With this in mind, we hope to initiate a long-lasting and productive dialogue with our fellow island researchers.

The concluding article of this volume complements the collection of archaeologically-themed articles with a study of contemporary Kiribati. Whincup's article and photographic documentation illustrate the impact of changes in material culture on social uses of space and the wider ramifications of such changes for broader social relations.

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Endnotes:

¹ The papers were presented at the 'Island Identities' conference held at University College London in 2006) (organised by Rennell with Dawson and Cooper, joint directors of FIRE) and at the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) meeting in Valletta (Malta, 2008), at a session entitled 'Island Archaeologies: Themes and Challenges' (organised by the Issue Editors).

² The issue editors would like to thank *Shima* for allowing them to publish expanded versions of papers from these sessions in three consecutive issues. They also wish to thank all the authors and peer-reviewers for their precious work.