

Editorial

Writing this editorial in January 2009, with media reports over global economic recession ringing in our ears, might make one wonder if this is truly the right moment to relaunch and expand a journal specialising in what those unfamiliar with it might still perceive as an esoteric field, African archaeology. Yet for proof to the contrary, we have only to look at the enormous success of last September's meeting in Frankfurt-am-Main of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists (SAfA; reported here by Graham Connah). Attended by almost 300 archaeologists from 33 countries, this conference not only displayed the great geographical and chronological diversity of archaeological research in Africa, but also underlined, through the sophistication of so many of its papers, the rich methodological and theoretical contributions that African archaeology now offers to the wider discipline. Moreover, many archaeologists from outside the Africanist sphere have attended the popular SAfA sponsored sessions at the meetings of the Society for American Archaeology meetings, since their inception in Puerto Rico in 2006. It is with full recognition of these facts that we feel that this is the perfect time to expand and enhance the opportunities for the publication of African archaeology by relaunching the journal *Azania* in this new format as *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa*.

The original *Azania* took wing in 1966 and for over 40 years was the principal publication outlet for the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA) and for the study of East Africa's archaeology and precolonial history. However, reading through past issues in preparation for writing this introduction demonstrates that *Azania* was never wholly an East African publication, with 23 out of 54 African countries represented in its pages. With this and BIEA's own recent commitment to supporting archaeological research in West, as well as Eastern, Africa in mind, we are therefore delighted to introduce to the archaeological and broader Africanist communities this new journal, which provides a forum for publishing papers and other contributions on *all* aspects of Africa's archaeology. In collaboration with Taylor & Francis Ltd, its new publishers, we are committed to transcending those chronological, geographical and linguistic boundaries that have historically hindered the effective communication and development of archaeological research in Africa. To that end, not only do we welcome papers from all regions of Africa and all periods of its past, but we emphasise that, from the start, *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* is a bilingual forum that publishes contributions in both English and French.

With three issues a year (in April, August and December), we look forward to providing an outlet for substantive papers that report on original fieldwork or laboratory-based studies, develop and apply new methodologies, offer synthetic overviews of key topics and debates, and address issues of current theoretical concern for Africa's archaeology and archaeologists. Convinced of the significance that African research holds – empirically, methodologically and conceptually – for the wider archaeological discipline, as well as of the importance of exploring the richness

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of Africa's historical connections with other parts of the world; we also welcome articles that place African archaeology within a broader comparative context, explore connections between different parts of the African continent, or between it and other world regions, including the diaspora, or approach those connections by combining archaeology with the results of historical, linguistic or genetic research. By special arrangement with the editors, and following the path already blazed by *Azania* itself, we also anticipate that some of our issues may concentrate on particular themes or regions of the continent and welcome suggestions from prospective guest editors.

As well as publishing major peer-reviewed papers, *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* also provides a range of other opportunities for communicating current research to the widest possible audience. Initial reports on ongoing research offer one such format. Another is our commitment to publishing the thesis abstracts of scholars who have recently completed their doctorates. Eight such abstracts are represented in this first issue. We shall also be publishing reports on major conferences, obituaries to honour deceased colleagues, and a wide range of book reviews designed to appeal to a broad audience. We hope that offering the new journal online (with the possibility of publishing colour illustrations and supplementary material), developing online access to all 43 back issues of *Azania*, and providing access on special terms to members of BIEA and SAfA will all help make *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* a successful, pan-continental journal of African archaeology. In achieving this goal, we look forward to the support of our colleagues on the editorial board and of the wider African archaeological community, and we provide detailed information regarding the submission of papers at the end of this volume.

In this first issue, we present a wide range of papers and reports, ranging geographically from Mauritania to Ethiopia to South Africa, and spanning the archaeologies of hunter-gatherers, early pastoralists and farmers, and complex trading networks. In addition, we look at archaeological studies of how contemporary societies use material culture and at some of the major challenges confronting the successful management of Africa's cultural heritage, while reporting on two major recent meetings (SAfA 2008 and Britain's own annual African Archaeology Research Day). All told, we cover research in 14 countries and especially welcome contributions from our Francophone colleagues on recent research in Tanzania and the state of archaeology in Niger. By the time we come to write our next editorial, in the first issue of 2010, we are sure that we shall be able to look back on as equally a varied, exciting and intellectually stimulating combination of articles from later this year.

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