The megalithic stone jar sites of Laos remain one of Southeast Asia's enduring archaeological mysteries. The sites, which are most commonly found on hill summits or flat plains, comprise large stone jars clustered in groups across the landscape. Although the stone jars have not been dated, it is probable that they were created during the Iron Age (c. 600 BC–AD 500), based on associated material culture (featured in this month's Project Gallery; image courtesy of Dougald O'Reilly, Louise Shewan and Thonglith Luangkhoth).

The entrance to Vrbička Cave, Montenegro. As part of the Hidden Foods Project, Emanuela Cristiani and colleagues will be aiming to reconstruct the importance of plant foods in forager subsistence in southern Europe, particularly in Italy and the Balkans. Fieldwork began in 2015, with flotation undertaken on Palaeolithic and Mesolithic layers in caves including Vrbička (featured in this month's Project Gallery; image courtesy of the Hidden Foods Project).

EDITORIAL

Nations and peoples are very much in the headlines today, what with the migrant crisis in the Aegean, and the imminent referendum on the UK's continued membership of the European Union. Prehistoric movements within and across real or imagined borders continue to perplex and fascinate archaeologists who seek to grapple with often ambiguous evidence. A classic example is the 'Celts'. Celtic art is easy enough to recognise, but what is the prehistoric reality behind it? That issue comes to the fore in the recent 'Celts: art and identity' exhibition. The exhibition opened at the British Museum in London in September 2015: Manuel Fernández-Götz reviewed it for *Antiquity* in our February issue[1], while Vincent Megaw, a frequent contributor on 'Celtic' issues, covered the accompanying exhibition catalogue[2]. In March 2016 the exhibition opened in its second incarnation at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, retitled, simply, 'Celts'.

Many of the same objects were displayed in both venues, although (naturally enough) some Scottish pieces were added to the Edinburgh display, while several of the pieces on show in London were missing. The Edinburgh 'Celts' was in a smaller venue, although no less packed with riches. Those expecting to see the key items of British Celtic art—the Witham and Battersea shields, the Waterloo helmet, the Snettisham torcs, the Torrs champfrein—will not be disappointed. And as in London, the Gundestrup cauldron occupies a pivotal position—deservedly but ironically so, given it is at best syncretistic, rather than Celtic, and was probably made somewhere in south-east Europe. We do not even know when it reached Scandinavia, only that it was unearthed by Danish peat-cutters at Borremose in 1891. Even if you have already seen the London 'Celts', the Edinburgh 'Celts' is definitely worth a visit. There is so much to see.

For a very different take on the Celts, we might turn to genetics. That is what Jean Manco has done in her recent book *Blood of the Celts*[3]. She begins with a definition: for her, the Celts are those people who speak Celtic languages. Hence her enquiry takes her back to the Indo-European origins of Celtic languages and the various migrations that might account for the present-day currency of those languages throughout Europe. Colin Renfrew's farming dispersal hypothesis is rejected in favour of one that places the spread of Indo-European in the late fourth and third millennia BC, emanating from the Yamnaya peoples of the Pontic steppe. Their progress across Europe is tracked by the tell-tale Y-DNA haplogroup R1. Here, Beakers enter the story, for the Beaker period was the crucial juncture at which Y-chromosome haplogroup G2A was replaced by haplogroup R1B (which dominates Europe today).

[1] Fernández-Götz, M. 2016. 'Celts: art and identity' exhibition: 'New Celticism' at the British Museum. *Antiquity* 90: 237–44. http://dx.doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2015.193
[2] Megaw, V. 2016. Identifying Celts. *Antiquity* 90: 245–48. http://dx.doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2015.195
[3] Manco, J. 2015. *Blood of the Celts: the new ancestral story*. London: Thames & Hudson.

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Manco is not the first to suggest that Beakers and proto-Celtic were opposite sides of the same coin, but this time with genetics thrown in. The heady brew of pots, languages and aDNA can be further seasoned with the isotopic evidence showing that many Beaker users were no idle stay-at-homes but may have been widely travelled (see Parker Pearson *et al.* in this issue, pp. 620–37). But what does all this tell us about the Celtic art on display in London and Edinburgh? The Celtic elites wearing flashy torcs, wielding glitzy swords and dashing across the battlefield in fancy chariots may have accepted a common identity—may even have spoken shared languages—but art styles and genetics are very different things.

Plague and pestilence

Our image of the historical Celts comes not from archaeology alone, of course, but also from the writings of Greek and Latin authors. If we suspect a discrepancy between what we are being told and what the archaeology shows, that would not be unusual. Two articles in the current issue of *Antiquity* probe the relationship of archaeology to history in different ways. The first of these describes a mass grave outside a medieval fortress in Bohemia (pp. 759–76). A good number of the deceased had met a violent end, and Ivo Štefan and his co-authors suggest that these are the victims of warfare following the overthrow of the famous Christian martyr Duke Wenceslas in the tenth century AD. What is interesting is the frequency of references to violence in medieval texts but its rarity in archaeological contexts. Discoveries such as this help to bring the two records together, but there is still a critical gap. Are they opposite sides of the same story, or are they different stories? How prevalent was warfare and violence in early medieval Europe (or indeed at any other period)? We are still a long way from being able to quantify it, or to understand its impact on the lives of the majority of the populace.

If violence did not carry you off prematurely, then perhaps disease would do that instead. But once again, quantification is difficult. In the New World, where European contact brought Old World diseases that killed huge numbers of the indigenous population, estimates from historical records alone vary widely. Accounts of Spanish missionaries and administrators suggest, however, that up to 90 per cent of the population may have died in a matter of a few decades, and that suggestion is now finding corroboration in archaeological studies of settlement patterns in regions such as the American Southwest. One recent analysis combined archaeology, dendrochronology and palaeoecology to reveal how Pueblo populations collapsed rapidly a century or so after the first European contact, ushering in a regrowth of natural forest vegetation and an upsurge in wildfires[4].

The closest analogy in Europe is the Black Death, which ravaged the continent during the fourteenth century. This was not the first major pandemic to afflict the continent—there had been serious outbreaks in the second and sixth centuries AD, and the ancestor of the plague bacillus *Yersinia pestis* has been recently shown to have been widespread across Eurasia much earlier, from the late fourth millennium BC[5]. But it was probably the worst, fuelled by

[4] Liebmann, M.J., J. Farella, C.I. Roos, A. Stack, S. Martini & T.W. Swetnam. 2016. Native American depopulation, reforestation, and fire regimes in the Southwest United States, 1492–1900 CE. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA* 113: E696–704. http://dx.doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1521744113

[5] Rasmussen, S., M.E. Allentoft, K. Nielsen, L. Orlando, M. Sikora, K.-G. Sjögren, A. G. Pedersen, M. Schubert, A. Van Dam, C.M.O. Kapel, H.B. Nielsen, S. Brunak, P. Avetisyan, A. Epimakhov, M.V.

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growing population levels during the Medieval Warm Period and the development of a new and more virulent form of the disease. The impact on the rural settlements of Western Europe is very clear from both historical and archaeological sources. Anyone travelling around the English countryside will have come across isolated medieval churches in picturesque settings. Sometimes a series of tell-tale humps and bumps in neighbouring fields shows where the village that the church served once stood. It would be misleading to suggest that the Black Death was the only reason for village abandonment in the late Middle Ages: the growth of towns and trade, and the creation of parks and sheep pastures, also played a part. A disease that led to the sudden death of 30–50 per cent of the population must surely, however, have left a very clear mark in the archaeological record. And what happened to those villages that were not entirely abandoned?

This is where test-pitting comes into its own. A community archaeology project led by Carenza Lewis excavated no fewer than 2000 1 × 1m test pits at surviving medieval villages in eastern England, digging in back gardens and other small spaces. The results, presented in this issue (pp. 777–97), show a 44 per cent decline in pottery use in the period following the Black Death. That compares closely with estimates from historical records, and represents a massive fall in population. It also demonstrates how spatial information can be used to quantify demographic change, one of the real challenges in understanding past societies.

Mapping the world

A key tool in the Black Death analysis, and in archaeology more generally, is, of course, the map. There are indeed very few *Antiquity* articles that do not include maps or plans. For the past several years we have also included a location map at the head of every article, alongside the abstract. O.G.S. Crawford, who founded *Antiquity*, had a special interest in maps as Archaeology Officer of the Ordnance Survey, the UK national mapping agency. He has even been credited with the invention of the archaeological distribution map[6].

Maps in archaeology show many different things, and serve many purposes. Some are large scale and broad brush, replete with arrows and peoples; others are detailed, with precisely marked findspots; and recent years have seen the digitisation of maps with the development of GIS. Crawford's correlation of Beakers and flat axes almost a century ago prefigures some of the recent applications of GIS, although the latter also takes us far beyond traditional mapping, with techniques such as least-cost pathways to reconstruct patterns of movement, and viewshed analysis for intervisibility. But the map remains an essential tool "correspond[ing] in space to the method of stratification (or juxtaposition) in time. Armed with these two implements of research the archaeologist can go to a land that had no history and make it"[7].

Khalyapin, A. Gnuni, A. Kriiska, I. Lasak, M. Metspalu, V. Moiseyev, A. Gromov, D. Pokutta, L. Saag, L. Varul, L. Yepiskoposyan, T. Sicheritz-Pontén, R.A. Foley, M.M. Lahr, R. Nielsen, K. Kristiansen & E. Willerslev. 2015. Early divergent strains of *Yersinia pestis* in Eurasia 5000 years ago. *Cell* 163: 571–82. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cell.2015.10.009

6 Bowden, M. 2001. Mapping the past: O.G.S. Crawford and the development of landscape studies. *Landscapes* 2: 29–45. http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/lan.2001.2.2.29

7 Bowden, M. 2001. Mapping the past: O.G.S. Crawford and the development of landscape studies. *Landscapes* 2: 29–45. http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/lan.2001.2.2.29

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Test-pit at Coddenham, Suffolk, looking for medieval pottery as a proxy for population change (photograph: Carenza Lewis).

With success has also come criticism, among other things the accusation that the map is an artificial Western construct, part of the 'totalising gaze' applied to landscapes by modern European observers, far removed from the experience of places as we encounter them in reality. That same totalising gaze does, of course, allow us to step back in time, and the totalising gaze takes on a different form in maps that are not so much geographies as cosmologies, or a mixture of the two. One of the most striking is the famous 'Mappa Mundi', spendidly displayed in the library at Hereford Cathedral: a typical mixture of the factual and the fanciful, with mythical beings and ferocious sea-serpents alongside recognisable coasts, rivers and towns. Time is collapsed, with the Tower of Babel and Garden of Eden making an appearance as well as contemporary medieval cities such as Rome, Constantinople and Paris. Nor is the Mappa Mundi without an archaeological element: Petra in Jordan—by this time long abandoned—and Alexander's Barrier, east of the Caspian Sea, are both shown. It is a remarkable artefact, at once strange yet familiar in its attempt to comprehend the whole of the known world and conflate elements of both past and present.

Despite his advocacy of maps in general, Crawford was rather dismissive of this particular map, disparagingly comparing "a modern map of the world to such medieval concoctions as the Hereford map"[8] that furthermore was "based upon mere speculation"[9]. Perhaps, half a century later, we are more fascinated by it as an archaeological artefact in its own right, than as a failed attempt to represent reality.

Chris Scarre
Durham, 1 June 2016

[8] Crawford, O.G.S. 1949. Men, machines and history. *Antiquity* 23: 100–106. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00020093

[9] Crawford, O.G.S. 1951. Editorial notes. *Antiquity* 25: 9–12. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00020640

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