


*Frontispiece 1. The Rosetta Stone on view in the British Museum. This fragment was originally part of a larger Egyptian temple stela. It records a priestly decree issued in 196 BC to record the granting of a royal cult to King Ptolomy V Epiphanes. The same decree is inscribed in sacred Egyptian hieroglyphs at the (broken) top, Demotic in the middle (the everyday script of literate Egyptians) and Greek characters at the bottom (the language used by the Macedonian Greek government). Scholars studied these and other inscriptions internationally, with Jean-François Champollion ultimately deciphering the ancient hieroglyphic script in 1822, in part thanks to the combination of the three different scripts and languages on the Stone plus his knowledge of the Coptic language. The Stone was discovered by a military engineer in 1799 at the port city of Rashid (Rosetta) during Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. When the French were defeated, the Stone was surrendered to the British Army as part of the Treaty of Alexandria in 1801. The Stone then entered the British Museum in 1802. Today, it is the museum's star attraction and is presented as a symbol of communication across languages, cultures and the ages. Photograph: R. Skeates.*



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press





*Frontispiece 2. Indus Valley steatite seal (32 × 32mm), with horned bull and script, in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio. The 'script' consists of a short series of symbols. It is found, often accompanying representations of animals, on a range of portable artefacts including stamp seals and pottery vessels, used especially from around 2600–1900 BC during the integration era of the Indus Valley Tradition (in what is now Pakistan and northern India). In January 2025, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin, announced a US$1 million government prize for experts or organisations that succeed in deciphering the script. This remains challenging because the inscriptions are generally short and no portion of a bilingual inscription has so far been discovered. Furthermore, there is no consensus on the identification of the language, or languages, represented, or even if one is present at all. Debate is broadly divided between the script representing a Dravidian or an Indo-European language. This can be contentious since such identifications have been utilised to develop hypotheses relating to origins and migrations of past populations based on the modern locations of these language groups. Pointing to similarities between graffiti marks found on potsherds in Tamil Nadu (in southern India) and on seals and sealings from the Indus Valley, Stalin hopes to highlight the antiquity of Tamil culture and to strengthen the claim that the language spoken within the Indus Valley Tradition was Dravidian—related to the Tamil language. Photograph: Cleveland Museum of Art. https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1973.160 CC0 1.0.*

Antiquity 2025 Vol. 99 (405): 611–623
https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69

# EDITORIAL

## *Linguae francae*, present and past

Should we agree that English is the *lingua franca* of world archaeology? One could argue that the benefits of our communicating via this global language outweigh the disadvantages experienced by non-fluent English speakers when participating in an increasingly Anglophone scientific universe. But, on reflection, it does seem paradoxical that most of the research articles in the current issue of *Antiquity* are written in English by archaeologists who neither speak English as their mother-tongue nor work in, or are based in, countries where English is the official language.

This inequity has been troubling multilingual international archaeologists for a while.[1] Indeed, debate about what language(s) archaeologists should communicate in goes back to the roots of the discipline, when the languages of the most powerful European nation-builders and colonisers were imposed onto the diversity of languages in the past and present (albeit with subsequent contestation). The Franco-British appropriation and deciphering of the trilingual Rosetta Stone offers one of the best-known archaeological examples (Frontispiece 1 & Figure 1). But the language politics of the past are very much alive in the world today, including around the undeciphered Indus 'script' (Frontispiece 2 & Figure 2).

A return to more sophisticated scholarly discourse was initiated recently by two successive Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) conference sessions on 'Archaeological theory in dialect' and 'Encouraging diverse language representation in archaeology' (co-organised by Brodhie Molloy, Judith López-Aceves, Jonny Graham and Alvaro Ortega González in 2023 and 2024). These sessions foregrounded the politics of language, questioned the Anglophone bias of archaeological theory and publication, highlighted the ambiguities and misunderstandings in translating keywords such as 'culture', 'social', 'gender' and 'theory', cautioned against uncritical use of AI (Artificial Intelligence) tools in translation and writing, and called on us all to embrace the richness, diversity and dynamism of languages.

These discussions align with my previous editorials about decolonising archaeology and about fast/slow archaeological science but also serve as preparation for taking stock of global archaeology at the tenth World Archaeological Congress (WAC) being held in Darwin, Australia, in June 2025. Article 3.2 of WAC's statutes specifies that "The languages of Congresses and their publications shall be any of the official languages of

[1] For example, Neustupný, E. 1997–98. Mainstreams and minorities in archaeology. *Archaeologia Polona* 35–36: 13–23.

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press




*Figure 1. Appropriating languages. Modern replica of the early nineteenth-century British Museum display of the Rosetta Stone. It is exhibited today in the Enlightenment gallery, originally built to house King George III's library. The Stone was mounted in an iron cradle at an angle, like a printed book, and with white chalk infill to enhance its legibility, similar to black-and-white printed text. The English text painted onto the left side (a) reads "CAPTURED IN EGYPT BY THE BRITISH ARMY 1801" and on the right side (b) "PRESENTED BY KING GEORGE III". Photographs: R. Skeates.*

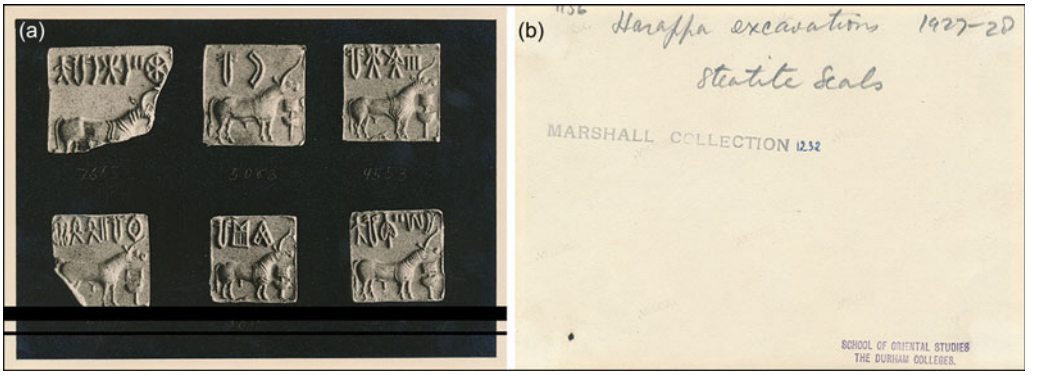



*Figure 2. Collecting languages: a) front: black-and-white monochrome photograph of six steatite seals excavated at Harappa during 1927–1928. Recurrent features comprise Indus 'script' across the top, a 'unicorn' and an offering stand; b) reverse: hand-written and stamped accession details in English. Today, the photograph forms part of the Marshall Archive held by Durham University's Oriental Museum (DUROM.1957.1.1232). Sir John Marshall formed his collection of photographs and drawings of South Asian archaeological remains while Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India between 1902 and 1931. Digital photographs: Oriental Museum, reproduced with permission, with thanks to Rachel Barclay for assistance.*

UNESCO"[2] (currently Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), English, French, Russian and Spanish), whereas WAC-10's current (and long-standing) position is that "The official language of the Congress is English. However, presentations can be in any language.

[2] https://worldarchaeologicalcongress.com/statutes/

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

PowerPoint presentations in languages other than English will need to include English subtitles."[3] In contrast, *Antiquity*'s current Submission Guidelines for authors firmly state that: "All articles are published in English. Please use UK English spellings throughout and verify the accuracy and spelling of any binomial nomenclature used."[4] However, the 'Author instructions' section in our document on 'Preparing your materials' advise that: "Authors, particularly those whose first language is not English, may wish to have their English-language manuscripts checked by a native speaker before submission. This step is optional, but may help to ensure that the academic content of the paper is fully understood by the Editor and any reviewers."[5] These official positions are well-intentioned responses to a complex and contentious set of issues, beginning with choosing which regional variety and 'native speaker' of English to use. All this calls for reconsideration of past and present thinking.

## The languages of archaeology

Over the past 30 years, scholars have questioned the languages that scientists, including archaeologists, use and their political and cognitive consequences, particularly in Europe with its powerful and diverse linguistic traditions. Although the debate may have lost some momentum in Anglophone archaeology over the past decade, perhaps due to the even greater dominance of the English language in global science today[6], two opposing positions stand out in print. Here, I summarise these before assessing the languages that underpin the current issue of *Antiquity* and then considering some ways forward. I am sincerely grateful to the following people who provided valuable corrections and comments on a first draft of this editorial: Rui Coelho Gomes, Christopher Davis, Helen Devonshire, Marta Díaz-Guardamino, Nathan Schlanger, Joana Valdez-Tullett and Valentina Vulpi.

### *Unilingualism*

A few prominent archaeologists, such as the late Willem Willems (the Dutch President of the European Association of Archaeologists between 1998 and 2003), have argued that—like it or not—"If we want to communicate, we have to speak the same language"[7] and "we should press for using English as much as possible"[8]. This policy of 'unilingualism' assumes that English has become the accepted meta-language of scientific communication and advocates its benefits for science and its researchers. In a sense, this is a pragmatic policy that 'tells it the way it is'. Despite the global importance of UNESCO's six official working

[3] https://worldarchaeologicalcongress.com/wac10/call-for-submissions/#:~:text=The%20official%20language%20of%20the,need%20to%20include%20English%20subtitles

[4] https://antiquity.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-11/Antiquity%20Submission%20Guidelines_Nov%202024_0.pdf

[5] https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquity/information/author-instructions/preparing-your-materials

[6] Ammon, U. (ed.) 2001. *The dominance of English as a language of science*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110869484

[7] Willems, W.J.H. 1999. *The future of European archaeology*: 9. Oxford: Oxbow.

[8] Willems, W.J.H. 2001. Discussion I, in Z. Kobylinski (ed.) *Quo vadis archaeologia? Whither European archaeology in the 21st century?*: 44–46, p.46. Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences.

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

languages, and many more besides, English is the most influential and fluid language of our time, whether in trade, computing, pop culture or science[9]. Even in Roman archaeology, for which an understanding of French, German and Italian is essential, not to mention Latin and ancient Greek, there is now a bias towards Anglophone publication.[10] For example, 'ROMAQ: the atlas project of Roman aqueducts' draws on bibliographic sources written in 23 different languages but "for practical reasons" uses English as the core language of its online database of known aqueducts within the area of the Roman empire.[11] And, in addition to helping enhance scientific understanding, co-operation and standards internationally, publishing in English gives researchers a competitive advantage in getting the quality, impact and prestige of their work recognised and ranked internationally. A paper written in English will be more widely cited, as will a paper with an English abstract. From this perspective, then, it is understandable that Claire Smith chose to edit the *Encyclopedia of global archaeology* in English, and it is commendable that around 140 entries were translated from French, Italian, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, with many more—written by authors whose first language is Chinese, German, Japanese or Turkish—being edited, rewritten and polished, "to ensure academic standards and clear communication".[12]

There are, however, downsides to this approach. The adoption of a single standardised scientific language runs the risk of our words becoming linguistically and conceptually bland, narrow, imprecise and inflexible. As Martin Carver has stated in a previous *Antiquity* editorial, "to think only in English may restrict the way we think about the past".[13] This may not be a concern for natal English-speakers, who are free to express themselves how they like (even poetically) in their mother-tongue. In fact, members of English-speaking societies are becoming increasingly monolingual and complacent; there is little incentive for them to invest in learning a second language or, for example, for US university librarians to purchase on behalf of their students Classical archaeology books published in languages other than English[14]. But the policy and practice of unilingualism disadvantages non-first-language speakers, burdening them with learning and using English as their second or third language, in which few achieve the highest level of proficiency.[15] It also devalues other languages and their respective archaeological terminologies and discourses, rendering them inferior, marginal or silent.[16] Evžen Neustupný (the late Czech archaeologist) made this point powerfully in his characterisation of communities of archaeologists in Europe, with, for

[9] Perlin, R. 2024. *Language city: the fight to preserve endangered mother tongues in New York*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.
[10] Kamash, Z. 2021. Rebalancing Roman archaeology: from disciplinary inertia to decolonial and inclusive action. *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal* 4: 1–41, p.33. https://doi.org/10.16995/traj.4330
[11] ROMAQ: the atlas project of Roman aqueducts. Available at: https://www.romaq.org/ (accessed 20 March 2025).
[12] Smith, C. 2014. Preface, in C. Smith (ed.) *Encyclopedia of global archaeology*: vii–ix, p.viii. New York: Springer.
[13] Carver, M. 2003. Editorial. *Antiquity* 77: 5–8, p.6. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00061287
[14] Hempel, K.G. 2013. Can scholarly communication be multilingual? A glance at language use in US Classical archaeology. *Humanities* 2: 128–46, p.136. https://doi.org/10.3390/h2020128
[15] For a detailed recent study of these disadvantages, see Amano, T. *et al.* 2023. The manifold costs of being a non-native English speaker in science. *PLoS Biology* 21(7): e3002184. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3002184
[16] Holtorf, C. 2008. The cunning means of domination. *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress* 4: 190–200. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11759-008-9047-y; Bernbeck, R. 2008. Archaeology and English as an Imperial lingua franca. *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress* 4: 168–70. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11759-008-9052-1

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

example, Britain hosting a 'mainstream' archaeological community, whose members communicate, sometimes exclusively, in English and only read papers written by colleagues from other countries to extract factual information, while members of 'minority' archaeological communities learn the language and paradigm of their respective mainstream community but are frequently misunderstood and marginalised.[17] This problem extends to other contexts and languages. For example, in 'Latin' American archaeology today, Indigenous scholars are increasingly having to publish in Spanish or Portuguese for their voices to be heard. 'Linguistic imperialism' is one way of describing this process[18], and, among various Anglophone media (e.g. Figure 3), international academic journals are implicated. For example, Kristian Kristiansen (the Danish first President of the European Association of Archaeologists between 1994 and 1998) has justifiably accused *Antiquity*'s editors of being complicit between the 1970s and 1990s, by allowing articles to become less multi-languaged in their bibliographic references, and by choosing very few non-English-language books for review, while at the same time expanding the global coverage of the journal.[19]

Politics are certainly at play here. Not to the extent of an intentional neo-colonial conspiracy to establish English as the dominant international language of archaeology, but enough to recognise that the promotion of one language over another is a political choice.[20] In European archaeology, for example, it is no coincidence that following the Second World War, some scholars—wanting to distance themselves from German archaeologists such as Gustaf Kossinna, whose racist and nationalist thinking influenced not only the Nazis but also other European archaeologists—turned their backs on German archaeology and German language publications.[21]

## *Multilingualism*

'Multilingualism' describes either an individual speaker using more than one language or the co-existence of multiple languages in a society. Some linguists have pointed out that, despite the assumptions made by many monolinguals, 'multilingualism' is the norm and multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers globally. However, with nearly half the world's languages now considered endangered[22], many linguists are increasingly pleading the case for linguistic diversity. For example, from a cognitive science perspective,

[17] Neustupný, E. 1997–98. Mainstreams and minorities in archaeology. *Archaeologia Polona* 35–36: 13–23.
[18] Phillipson, R. 1992. *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[19] Kristiansen, K. 2001. Borders of ignorance: research communities and language, in Z. Kobylinski (ed.) *Quo vadis archaeologia? Whither European archaeology in the 21st century?*: 38–44. Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences.
[20] Venclová, N. 2007. Communication within archaeology: do we understand each other? *European Journal of Archaeology* 10: 207–22, p.214. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461957108095985; Simandiraki, A. & T. Grimshaw. 2008. Linguistic imperialism and Minoan archaeology (Greece). *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress* 4: 186–89, p.188. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11759-008-9060-1
[21] Milisauskas, S. 2011. Historical observations on European archaeology, in S. Milisauskas (ed.) *European prehistory: a survey*. Second edition: 7–21. New York: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-6633-9_2
[22] Bromham, L. *et al.* 2022. Global predictors of language endangerment and the future of linguistic diversity. *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 6: 163–73, p.163. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-021-01604-y

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press




*Figure 3. Linguistic imperialism? Statues and inscription over the neoclassical entrance to Bush House, London dedicated to "The Friendship of English Speaking Peoples". Constructed in 1925–1935 as an Anglo-American trade centre, the building later served as the headquarters of the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) World Service. Photograph: R. Skeates.*

while mother-tongue education and language maintenance contribute to mental wellbeing—especially for members of marginalised Indigenous and minority groups—knowing more than one language helps keep the brain alert and contributes to cognitive flexibility and empathy, since we do not simply express thoughts through language, we think in and through language. From a contextual perspective, it is also said that languages express diverse ways of experiencing and understanding, not all of which will be, or can be, translated.

These arguments have been extended by several archaeologists. Thomas Meier, for example, has pointed out that mainstream academic archaeology is richer and of higher quality when informed by multiple language communities and their related archaeological traditions, literatures, terminologies and discourses.[23] The '*Intraduisibles*' (Untranslatables) project offers a great example, where terms such as 'museum' and 'heritage', considered across the French, English, Fulfulde and Bamanakan languages used in Sub-Saharan Africa, have provoked creative thinking and translations beyond the dominant definitions of

[23] Meier, T. 2017. German-speaking archaeology is more. *Archaeological Dialogues* 24: 29–36. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1380203817000034

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

UNESCO and European institutions.[24] Sub-groups of archaeologists can also benefit from speaking their own languages. An interesting example is provided by the history of the journal *K.A.N. – Kvinner i arkeologi i Norge* (Women in archaeology in Norway): the first 20 volumes were published (from 1985) nearly exclusively in Scandinavian languages (Norwegian, Swedish, Danish). Lisbeth Skogstrand argues that, despite the limited international impact of the journal, it constituted a safe space for Norwegian women archaeologists to build a strong network and to formulate new thinking.[25] In 2001, Kristian Kristiansen claimed that archaeology, when spoken and written in diverse languages, can contribute positively to the formation of national and local identities.[26] More recently, ethical debates have also highlighted the responsibilities of archaeologists to share their knowledge in the languages of the communities whose heritage they have been privileged to study.

The trouble is, in academic archaeology, scholars are rightly concerned that when not published in English and with English author names, their research will not be accessed, cited or positively assessed internationally. Neustupný put it more starkly for European archaeology: "The work of the majority of archaeologists in this continent is simply wasted, because nobody reads it and nobody uses it."[27]

## The languages of *Antiquity*

☙ These established debates about unilingualism and multilingualism remain relevant to the theory and practice of archaeology today. One concern I have with them, however, is that their polarised positions no longer adequately align with the complexity of the world of languages we now inhabit—verbally, in writing and especially online. The 14 research articles published in the current issue of *Antiquity* are a small but representative microcosm, and—even when analysed superficially—reveal some of the complex linguistic patterns and processes that have led to their formation, ultimately in the English language.

We know very little about the languages of the journal's authors. Without in-depth research, we cannot say what languages they possess and to what degree of proficiency. We do not know what languages they communicate in with family and with colleagues in their various workplaces. Nor do we know precisely who wrote which section of their texts and how this was achieved, since all except one are multi-authored and none acknowledge linguistic support, either from a language professional or by digital means—and they do not need to do so. What is reasonably clear, however, from the institutional affiliations of our authors, is that, as members of research teams, the majority do work across national language boundaries, given that they are based in 21 different countries and have obtained their

[24] Cassin, B. *et al.* 2014. *Les intraduisibles du patrimoine en Afrique Sub-Saharienne*. Paris: Demopolis.
[25] Skogstrand, L. 2023. A safe space for women archaeologists? The impact of K.A.N. on Norwegian archaeology, in S.L. López Varela (ed.) *Women in archaeology: intersectionalities in practice worldwide*: 327–44. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-27650-7_16
[26] Kristiansen 2001: 43.
[27] Neustupný, E. 2001. Discussion I, in Z. Kobylinski (ed.) *Quo vadis archaeologia? Whither European archaeology in the 21st century?*: 44–46 Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, p.44.

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

archaeological data from 13 countries where at least seven national languages are spoken. In other words, in most cases, it is unlikely that they have worked monolinguistically.

Looking at the languages of the literature our authors have cited, the situation becomes a little clearer. English-language publications dominate exclusively in the case of two articles dealing with the archaeology of the UK and Australia, almost exclusively (99 per cent) in the article on Irish archaeology, then between 92 and 70 per cent in most other cases. Just two articles have much lower English-language citation levels, of 52 and 27 per cent respectively, due to the importance of Spanish-language publications relating to the archaeology of Spain and Bolivia. French- and German-language publications make a small but regular appearance. Chinese publications are cited with reference to the archaeology of China, Mongolia and Indonesia. Nine other languages are cited infrequently (Italian, Albanian, Macedonian, Greek, Russian, Mongolian, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Tae'). Several factors are likely to be at play here, including the history of research traditions in different countries plus author language preference and competence today.

The quality of the written English produced by our authors can also be assessed, albeit with caveats as to the validity of the assessment results. One way to do this is to use Microsoft Editor in Word, which provides an Editor Score: a percentage that expresses the readability of a document based on its grammar, spelling, clarity, conciseness and formality. It (questionably) assumes that there is a standard written English. The recommended score is around 70–80 per cent. When first submitted, half of our articles scored below 70 per cent. Unsurprisingly, author teams that include an author based in the UK or in North America produced higher-scoring texts. But not all North American-based authors write fluently in English, and not all English-speaking authors write clearly in English. Most peer reviewers avoid commenting on the quality of the English language of submitted papers, because many of them are not fluent English speakers either, while the few who do provide recommendations are not always correct. Most papers accepted for publication in *Antiquity* take a lot of editing to bring them up to the high standard of readability that we aim for. Three of the articles published in this issue consequently saw increases in their Editor Scores of between 50 and 52 per cent. But this does raise the questions of whether our authors should be concerned with their Editor Scores, and just how 'interventionist' our editorial team should be, even though we invite authors to review our edits and, potentially, choose not to accept them.

This brief analysis of the language used in and around the current issue of *Antiquity* confirms a generally strong Anglophone bias, especially as far as citations are concerned, but not to the complete exclusion of other global and regional languages used either verbally during the course of research or in written scientific communication. Basically, academic archaeologists have not adopted a global policy of unilingualism, their work is practised in and informed by diverse languages, and their written English is negotiable.

## Translingualism

One lesson to be learnt from this exercise is for proficient English speakers to be even more conscious of their linguistic privilege, including in the digital realm, where English-based speech recognition, automatic translation, spellcheck and AI tools are available to

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

make their working lives easier. A useful exercise might be for them to attend a conference session listening to a language they can barely understand, with patience, interest and a willingness to learn using all means possible. They might, then, be even more generous: slowing down or reducing the use of idioms when speaking in English to multi-language audiences, providing translations of PowerPoint slides when presenting to other linguistic communities, offering writing assistance to non-fluent colleagues, encouraging their students to develop foreign-language skills relevant to their specialist fields of research, and investing in reading and citing publications whatever their language. Editors of international English-language journals could also review their own policies and practices, to ensure that their editorial boards span a wide range of languages as well as regions, to accept peer reviews written by specialists in their chosen language, and to review books published in various languages.

I am not convinced that translation offers all the answers to working across the multiple languages of archaeology. Certainly, translations of key texts have significantly impacted the history of international archaeological method and theory. For example, archaeological use-wear analysis and traceology owe their global adoption to the 1964 translation into English of Sergey Semenov's original Russian-language publication, Первобытная техника (*Prehistoric technology*).[28] However, simultaneous translations of conference presentations, parallel translations in published volumes, published translations of seminal books and professional proofreading are luxuries that few archaeological organisations can afford today, let alone individual authors. The promise of automated translation software is also far from fulfilled. For example, responding to Keith Kintigh's call for automated translation to extract information from archaeological texts in multiple languages to facilitate large-scale data integration and synthesis[29], a research team working within the auspices of the European Commission-funded project ARIADNE (Advanced Research Infrastructure for Archaeological Dataset Networking in Europe) has attempted the integration of digital archaeological 'grey literature' reports and data written in three languages (English, Dutch and Swedish) using natural language processing (NLP)[30]. This feasibility study was successful but involved a complex digital workflow, including essential data cleansing and use of a common controlled vocabulary, so it represents only a small and laborious step towards achieving Kintigh's vision. Large Language Models—a type of AI, trained on vast quantities of textual data, that can perform tasks such as text generation and translation—are rapidly developing and have the potential to save labour in many other academic tasks. But concerns are being raised about the sources of their training data and about their inherent biases. Even translating core archaeological terms can be complex. Ask Google to translate 'archaeologists' into Spanish and its generative AI produces the male form, 'arqueólogos'; while in Pakistan, the process of translating the English word

[28] Semenov, S.A. 1964. *Prehistoric technology*. Translated by M.W. Thompson. London: Cory, Adams and Mackay.
[29] Kintigh, K.W. 2015. Extracting information from archaeological texts. *Open Archaeology* 1: 96–101. https://doi.org/10.1515/opar-2015-0004
[30] Binding, C., D. Tudhope & A. Vlachidis. 2019. A study of semantic integration across archaeological data and reports in different languages. *Journal of Information Science* 45: 364–86. https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551518789874

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'archaeology' into Urdu and Sindhi (not to mention Punjabi, Pashto, Balochi and other Pakistani languages) has led to several contrasting definitions and understandings[31]. And when it comes to concepts used in archaeological theory, the complexities increase. For example, the questionable translation of Deleuze and Guattari's[32] use of the French term '*agencement*' into the English 'assemblage' (instead of 'arrangement') has benefitted English-speaking archaeological theorists in developing an interest in 'assemblage theory', but some meaning has been lost in translation[33]. Transcription of Chinese characters into Roman characters, using different transcription systems, and their further modification to suit Western tongues also creates misnomers, as exemplified by the renowned Chinese archaeologist 張光直 (Zhang Guangzhi) who became known in the West as K.C. Chang.[34] Not everything is translatable.

Instead of some Anglophone archaeologists perceiving linguistic diversity as a hinderance to standardised data capture and communication, I suggest we embrace its complexity. To do this, we need to understand and use languages slightly differently: not as the bounded entities that underpin thinking about monolingualism and multilingualism, but as flexible resources that speakers and writers use in specific contexts to enhance communicating. We do not all need to become 'plurilinguals' (with interconnected knowledge of multiple languages and an ability to switch between them when necessary); we should aim for 'translingualism'. For the English language, this gives speakers choice and agency to borrow creatively from other languages (continuing a process that has gone on for centuries) and for new forms of English to emerge in disparate linguistic contexts.[35] It also encourages linguistic and cultural sensitivity and confidence. In archaeological artefact studies, for example, the influential concept of the *chaîne opératoire* is more meaningful, effective and animated (with the diacritics retained) in its original French than the dull 'operational chain' or 'sequence' of the English language. So let us value just how linguistically diverse and complex archaeology is and enjoy the babble.

## *Antiquity* Prize and Ben Cullen Prize 2024

Each year, the Antiquity Trust recognises the two best articles published in the previous volume through the award of the *Antiquity* Prize and the Ben Cullen Prize. To identify this year's winners, a shortlist of articles published in 2024 was drawn up by our Editorial Advisory Board, then the Antiquity Trustees and Directors cast their votes.

[31] Gohar, S. 2023. Terminology for archaeology in the Pakistani languages. *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 71(4): 11–22. https://www.phs.com.pk/index.php/phs/article/view/297; c.f. Schlanger, N. 2017. Dire l'archéologie en Européen: vers une terminologie compare, in L. Manolakakis, N. Schlanger & A. Coudart (ed.) *European archaeology: identities and migrations*: 157–70. Leiden: Sidestone.

[32] Deleuze, G. & F. Guattari. 1987 [1980]. *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. Translated by B. Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

[33] Hamilakis, Y. & A.M. Jones. 2017. Archaeology and assemblage. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 27: 77–84, p.80. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959774316000688

[34] Hein, A. 2016. The problem of typology in Chinese archaeology. *Early China* 39: 21–52, p.22. https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.18

[35] For example, Pennycook, A. 2007. *Global Englishes and transcultural flows*. London & New York: Routledge.

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The winners of this year's *Antiquity* Prize are Cyprian Broodbank, Giulio Lucarini, Youssef Bokbot, Hamza Benattia and colleagues for their article *Oued Beht, Morocco: a complex early farming society in north-west Africa and its implications for western Mediterranean interaction during later prehistory*, published in the October issue (401). Archaeological survey at Oued Beht has revealed the earliest and largest agricultural complex yet found in Africa beyond the Nile. In sharing features with contemporaneous sites in Iberia, it also brings the Maghreb into dialogue with wider western Mediterranean developments during the fourth and third millennia BC.

The Ben Cullen Prize goes to Dylan Gaffney, Daud A. Tanudirjo, Erlin Novita Idje Djami, Zubair Mas'ud and colleagues for their article *Human dispersal and plant processing in the Pacific 55 000–50 000 years ago*, published in the August issue (400). The authors present the results of their archaeological research in the Raja Ampat Islands, north-west of New Guinea, which provide the earliest known evidence for humans arriving in the Pacific more than 55 000–50 000 years ago.

Congratulations to our winning authors! Their prize-winning articles are now available to read for free via our website (www.antiquity.ac.uk/open/prizes), where you can also find all previous winners from the past 30 years. It would be interesting to see how the languages of archaeology have been transformed over that period.

Robin Skeates
Durham, UK, 1 June 2025

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2025.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press