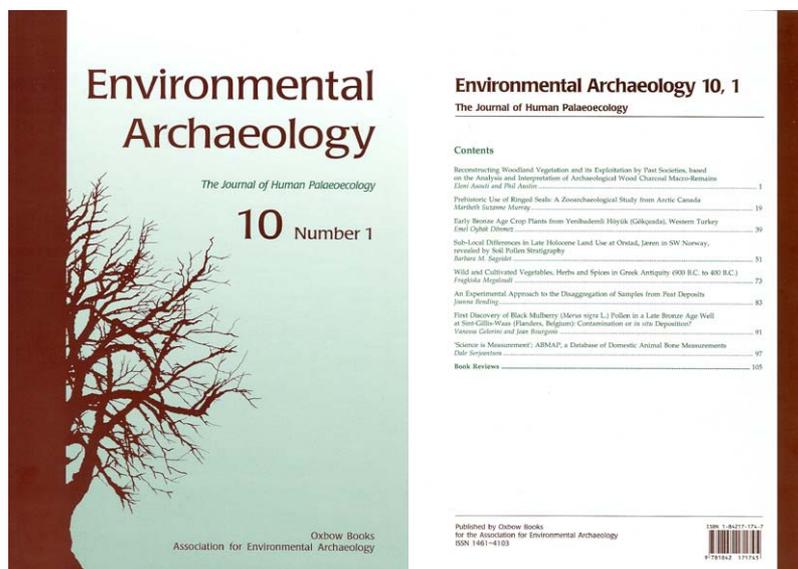


**Jones, G. 2005. Environmental Archaeology. The Journal of Human Palaeoecology. Volume 10, 1. – Oxford, Oxbow Books (Association for Environmental Archaeology)**

Book review by W.A. Out



On the internet, one can find detailed information about the aims and scope of the journal of the Association for Environmental Archaeology (AEA), 'Environmental Archaeology'. The international peer reviewed journal "aims to publish contributions on all aspects of environmental archaeology, from methodology to synthesis and theory". Furthermore, it aims to publish papers that "consider the interaction between humans and their environment in the archaeological and historical past" and "cover a range of environmental specialisms within archaeology, such as archaeobotany, archaeozoology (both vertebrate and invertebrate), palynology, geoarchaeology, biological anthropology, as well as more synthetic and theoretical approaches to the past human environment" (from: [www.maney.co.uk/journals/env](http://www.maney.co.uk/journals/env)). This description indicates that the title of the journal can be interpreted as broad as it suggests, while it is assured that all subjects are in some way related with human palaeoecology. Until recently, Oxbow Books was the publisher of the journal, but from 2006 onwards Maney Publishing will be the publisher. This change is related with the wish to publish the journal online.

Volume 10.1 of 'Environmental Archaeology' contains eight papers, including five substantial research papers, three shorter papers, and five book reviews. The titles of the papers and the names of the authors are shown in the photograph of the cover; an outline of each paper can be found on the website of the AEA.

The content of the volume does not precisely match the broad scope of the journal since it strongly focuses on archaeobotany (in the broadest sense of the word): there are six papers based on archaeobotany versus two papers based on archaeozoology, while the topics geoarchaeology and biological anthropology are absent in this volume. This focus on archaeobotany is however compensated by the content of other volumes. The next volume for example will present many articles dealing with archaeozoology. Furthermore, the focus on archaeobotany is not a true focus since the papers cover a broad variety concerning research questions, the type of data (pollen/seeds/charcoal) and methodology (analysis of remains from excavations, analysis of literary evidence, extensive discussion of literature, and experimental approach). In addition, the book reviews that are part of the journal represent the broad scope of the journal very well.

The overall quality of all papers is very good. They all have a clear structure, they precisely define their problem or topic and come up with highly relevant and valid results, conclusions and discussions. Most papers offer the rough data, which I personally appreciate very much, and in the rare case primary data are absent, they can be traced back in the given references. In many cases the data are supported by additional information from different angles, like auto-ecology of taxa, historical perspectives, extensive soil horizon descriptions, etc. For example, I highly appreciated the amount and variety of information in the paper on ringed seals, and the extensive discussion in the paper on analysis and interpretation of charcoal macro-remains giving a useful overview of relevant literature as well as new applications. But also in the less extensive contributions authors provide the reader very carefully with information explaining the research background (see the paper on the bone database), contextual information of finds (see the paper on black mulberry pollen) and/or methodology. In addition, most of the papers present new methodologies, approaches, research possibilities, or new applications of common methods. The volume contains only one paper that seems to be a sound though rather classical site

report, presenting the results of an excavation without posing *a priori* research questions and without breaking fresh ground. It should nevertheless be realised that such reports generally form the basis of more complex studies in environmental archaeology and therefore are indispensable.

In 1998, the year of appearance of the first two volumes of 'Environmental Archaeology', the journal was reviewed by Lane (PhD student at that time) in 'Assemblage', the University of Sheffield Graduate Student Journal of Archaeology (available on internet). One of his major comments was that the journal bridges the gap between science-based archaeology and theory-based archaeology or (somewhat polarized) between processualists and post-processualists. Although I have not analysed all previous volumes in detail, I agree that the journal indeed shows to support that ecological data form the basis for studying complex human palaeoecological problems, while at the same time it contains papers that use ecological data to apply theory on a high level, solve complex archaeological problems and reveal parts of human society. For example, the paper on interpretation of charcoal finds discusses what should be taken into consideration when aiming to detect selective use of wood by people, and how to link firewood exploitation with for example mobility and subsistence models. Another example where the research clearly goes beyond pure ecology is the paper on the status and use of wild and cultivated vegetables, herbs and spices in Greek antiquity. Although the direct archaeological evidence in this paper is not extensive for some examples, the combined approach including both archaeobotany as well as literary sources enables interpretation of finds on a higher level.

Other comments of Lane were the limited variety concerning the background of the authors (that is well mixed in volume 10.1 in my opinion), and the restricted geographical range covered by the papers, which mainly concerned Europe and the Mediterranean region in the first two volumes.

This earlier observed restricted geographical range is present in volume 10 as well (except for the study from Arctic Canada), while it is less striking when considering the journal in general, since research from the Near East and Arctic regions is regularly included. Although the geographical range can still be broader, I have the impression that the geographical focus of the journal corresponds with the main geographical range of archaeological activity, especially performed by European scholars. Therefore I think that the current range is not related to the journal itself.

Summarising, although the volume discussed here is especially relevant for archaeobotanists and archaeozoologists, the journal is overall very useful and stimulating for a broad group of specialists working in environmental archaeology as well as for archaeologist interested in the palaeoecological approach of people and past societies. The range of subjects of the papers is varied and interesting, and the overall level is high. The journal offers easy access to the work of colleagues and demonstrates new pathways in environmental archaeology. I am enthusiastic about the expected publication on the internet, since this will probably make the journal more easily accessible for a broader public, including students.

Finally, I would like to make a suggestion to both environmental archaeologists and non-environmental archaeologists, in other words not only to the authors that publish in 'Environmental Archaeology'. What I miss are sound suggestions for future research at the end of articles when relevant. In the volume of 'Environmental Archaeology' discussed here, such suggestions are present in some articles, directly or indirectly, but sometimes this element is completely lacking. In the article based on experimental approach for example, more detailed suggestions for future research would not be misplaced at all. What is planned for the future, how is it possible to test the hypothesis further, what kind of data does one expect if the hypothesis or conclusion holds true? On the one hand some research projects are not suited for this approach, yet on the other hand research always leads to new questions. Although archaeology is often limited by factors like opportunities to excavate, money and time, this should not prevent scientists from formulating their remaining questions, expectations and curiousness.

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## References

The address of the website of the Association for Environmental Archaeology: <http://www.envarch.net/>  
The address of the website of the journal 'Assemblage': <http://www.shef.ac.uk/assem/4/>  
The address of the website of the new editor Maney Publishing: [www.maney.co.uk/](http://www.maney.co.uk/)

W.A. Out (MSc)  
Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University  
[w.a.out@arch.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:w.a.out@arch.leidenuniv.nl)