Editor's Inaugural Remarks

Akin Ogundiran

Published online: 7 March 2019

© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2019

This occasion is the latest in my many special moments with *African Archaeological Review* (AAR). I vividly remember the first time I set my eyes on a copy of the journal—the first issue published in 1983. It was in 1984, and I was only a few months into my first year as a college student. Thanks to my professors at Ife (Nigeria) who would send students to the library to read journal articles in the periodical room, I was already aware that academic journals are the bearers of the most current information in a discipline. I was thrilled to find a journal dedicated to the continental coverage of African archaeology. From that moment of discovery, AAR became my window into new ideas and syntheses on the diverse topics that Africa uniquely offers to world archaeology and the people associated with those ideas. Since then, there have been other special moments such as the publication of one of my own articles in the journal in 2002, my several assignments as a reviewer for the journal, and my appointment to the editorial board in 2009. Many of us can relate to the position that AAR has occupied in our professional lives and growth as scholars. It is with this acknowledgment and appreciation that I gladly accepted the opportunity and challenge to serve as the editor-in-chief of the journal. I can say that I have been living this special moment with AAR almost every day over the past four months.

Let me use this opportunity to thank the founding editor of the journal, Nicholas David, and his successors David Phillipson, Fekri Hassan, and Adria LaViolette, for building *African Archaeological Review* into an intellectual giant. My goal is to uphold their legacy and continue with the great work they have done. My special gratitude to Adria LaViolette, Matthew Pawlowicz, Teresa Krauss (Springer's Executive Editor, Archaeology and Anthropology), and Springer production staff for making the editorial transition easy and painless. And I am also grateful to Cameron Gokee for accepting the invitation to join the editorial team as associate editor and book review editor. Cameron is an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology at Appalachian State University whose research adopts a multi-scalar approach to the long-term histories of village communities in the Upper Senegal-Niger region of West Africa.

I have had the opportunity to consult with several AAR editorial board members and other constituencies for ideas and suggestions since I accepted the position to be the journal's next editor. We all agree that the mainstay of the journal is its commitment to archaeology as an empirical and theoretical science. Its scope is broad and covers all aspects of past human endeavours, from palaeoanthropology to the unfolding present. We are committed to ensuring that this diversity of human experience continues to reflect in *African Archaeological Review* as demonstrated by the range of articles in the current issue, covering different temporalities from the Later Stone Age in South Africa and Ethiopia to the social landscape of colonial experience in Tanzania. We

A. Ogundiran (✉)
Department of Africana Studies, UNC Charlotte, Charlotte, NC
28223, USA
e-mail: ogundiran@uncc.edu

will continue to welcome and foster debates that thrive on the spirit of openness, critical engagement, experimentation, and self-understanding, bearing in mind that the wisdom and certainty of today may become the folly of tomorrow. The converse is also true, a reminder that no one has the final word. To this end, it is crucial that different positionalities and epistemologies that mediate our empirical and theoretical framings be given the space to contribute to the enterprise of African archaeology. We anticipate that the melding or juxtaposition of such positionalities can bring us a better understanding, especially when scholars from different backgrounds and ranks collaborate as co-creators of knowledge or are engaged in multi-directional conversations.

I want to echo Adria's measured statement in her last editorial that the "journal is in 'good health'" (LaViolette 2018, p. 481). This "good health" is a product of the phenomenal growth in African archaeology during the past 10 years, in Europe and North America as well as in Asia and Africa. It is particularly noteworthy that recent years have witnessed an expansion of archaeology programs in many African institutions from Senegal to Nigeria, Tanzania to South Africa, Morocco to Botswana, in the form of new curricula, rising student enrollment, and an increase in faculty hiring. We must be attentive to the kinds of archaeology that African institutions are developing. The coupling of heritage studies with archaeology is a trend that is receiving wide acceptance on the continent. Heritage-centered archaeology is part of the quest for an Africa-centered social science that is attentive to indigenous knowledge as the basis for formulating and answering research questions. The goal is to privilege African epistemologies for explaining African ways of being, and building new theories that advance the understanding of our common humanity. This development challenges us to be open to different archaeologies. These will matter to a diverse cast of interest groups, and to the possibilities of reconciling the comparative cross-cultural approaches of anthropological archaeology, with the particularistic and multiversal framework of heritage archaeology. I suspect that we would need to rethink how we present and write scientific ideas so that we can effectively respond to this epistemological quest for Africa-centered archaeology. *African Archaeological Review* has a vital role to play in this process. We, therefore, welcome bold, experimental, non-linear, and open-ended research presentations and narratives that lack finality but are consistent with the spirit of

becoming, a core ontology of being in many African societies. At the same time, we will continue to be guided by the firm belief that every intellectual tradition, irrespective of its genealogy, has a role to play in our ongoing efforts to make African archaeology a better science.

A journal editor is more than a gatekeeper, a manager, or a textual interrogator. S/he is also a facilitator of ideas, a collaborator with authors and reviewers, a mentor to junior scholars, an advisor to prospective authors, and a mediator of competing ideas. I have been privileged to watch Adria perform some of these roles at different times in the past 10 years on behalf of AAR. I intend to build on and expand these roles. Therefore, AAR cannot be a passive recipient of manuscripts. The journal has a direct and active part to play in cultivating new ideas and providing the forum for conversations that seek to move the agenda of African archaeology forward. We encourage our readers to propose forums and special issues that explore multiple perspectives on any topic. Likewise, the journal has the responsibility to respond to contemporary global and African affairs. After all, we study the past in the present, and some of the challenges that ancestral Africans dealt with not only have universal resonance but are also relevant today. It is for this reason that we are introducing the forum "Useable Past: What Can African Archaeology Tell Us about the Present?". In the coming years, we anticipate that the forum will address hot-button issues such as climate change and its consequences, civic community, regional integration, food security, social justice, sustainability, and resilience, to mention but a few. The "Useable Past" forum is a consolidation of many previous initiatives that seek to make African archaeology relevant to the contemporary needs and aspirational goals of the people, communities, and countries in Africa. We hope it will be a model for critical, engaged, and socially relevant archaeology; and a platform for imagining a better future. We have also expanded the scope of our book reviews to include the New Media. We encourage authors and their publishers all over the world to send their print, audiovisual, and digital publications to Cameron Gokee, our book review editor.

Finally, I would like to use this opportunity to thank our legion of reviewers. They are the backbone of a peer-reviewed journal like ours. The thoughtful and detailed comments that we receive from reviewers are essential to maintaining the integrity of the journal. We are working on improving the process by which peer

reviews are conducted to achieve the maximum satisfaction of both the reviewers and the authors. All of these will go a long way to reducing the lag between manuscript submission and the editor's decision. Let me repeat the usual refrain of my predecessors: "please keep on submitting," so we can keep our particular special moments with AAR going. Do not hesitate to contact me at ogundiran@uncc.edu if you have any questions.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Reference

LaViolette, A. (2018). Editorial. *African Archaeological Review*, 35(4), 481–482.