



# The *African Archaeological Review* Turns Forty: Some Reflections on the Past, Present, and Future

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## Introduction

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the *African Archaeological Review* (AAR). For many people, 40 years represents the onset of middle age, but for an academic journal, this is a milestone of maturity and collective perseverance looking into an unforeseeable future. We have the distinct honor of being in a position to thank the many people and institutions responsible for the development and success of AAR—from the visionary senior colleagues who launched this journal in 1983, to the publishers, editors, and advisory board members who have worked tirelessly to print issue after issue, to you, the authors, reviewers, subscribers, and readers.

On a sad note, this anniversary year began with the departure of AAR's founding editor-in-chief to the land of the ancestors. On January 11, 2023, Nicholas (Nic) David passed on peacefully following a protracted illness. Nic was a towering intellectual figure and leader whose contributions to the professional

development of archaeology have few rivals. Although he worked in many African countries, Nic made his most indelible marks on the archaeology of Nigeria and Cameroon through long-term research as the Director of the Mandara Archaeology Project (MAP). Under the auspices of that project, the indefatigable Nic spearheaded the nomination of Sukur—a monumental complex of terraced farmlands, dry stone structures, and stone paved walkways—to become the first World Heritage-designated site in Nigeria. He was also a pioneer in disseminating archaeology research through documentary films. We are grateful to Judy Sterner, Diane Lyons, and Scott MacEachern for writing Nic's obituary in this issue.

This issue also features an autobiography by David Phillipson, AAR's second editor-in-chief, followed by five commentaries discussing the impact of his scholarship on African and global archaeology. Spanning six decades, from the final years of colonial rule to the present day, David's professional journey (with Laurel, fellow archaeologist, and wife) embodies the history of African archaeology. Like a compass, his story, along with those of other senior colleagues recently published in AAR (Kusimba & Pikirayi, 2020; Varadinová & Jakoubek, 2022) provides a guide to where African archaeology is coming from, and where it is heading. We look forward to sharing stories about the professional careers of other senior colleagues in future autobiographies and interviews.

Beyond this issue, we have scheduled other publications to mark the fortieth anniversary of AAR. For

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September, Ann Stahl is collaborating with educators and other archaeologists on a special issue titled “African Archaeology in Support of School Learning.” This special issue will be previewed in a panel session at the Society of Africanist Archaeologists (SAfA) conference later this year. The articles in the issue will explore concrete ways for communicating and integrating archaeological knowledge (e.g., foodways, metallurgy) into school curriculums from the elementary through high school levels. For December, we are organizing a forum on “The Future of African Archaeology” to take stock of recent developments in a wide range of topics—including human origins and the genesis of modern behavior, the use of indigenous epistemology/ontology for theorizing the past and understanding the archaeological record, the social responsibilities of archaeology, and the implications of recent methodological breakthroughs for answering archaeological questions.

As a prelude to this upcoming forum, we use this editorial to explore thematic and demographic trends in *AAR* publications over the past 40 years. Our survey of these data will, we hope, enable readers to reflect on the history of the journal and African archaeology, while also stimulating conversations about the future.

### **AAR: A Brief History**

The *African Archaeological Review* was established in 1983 as an official publication of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists (founded in 1971). Building on the success of regional journals such as the *West African Journal of Archaeology*, the *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, and *Azania* (originally dedicated to the publication of research by the British Institute in Eastern Africa), *AAR* was the first continent-wide archaeology journal. The first twelve volumes were published by Cambridge University Press, with one issue released each year (1983–1994). During this period, Nicholas David laid a solid foundation for the journal as the first editor-in-chief from 1983 to 1987, before being succeeded by David W. Phillipson from 1987 to 1994. The Plenum Press took over the publication of the journal in 1995 with Fekri Hassan as editor-in-chief, but no issue was published that year due to this reorganization. Beginning in 1996, *AAR* became a quarterly journal, now publishing four

issues per year. Adria LaViolette then took the helm as editor-in-chief from 2009 to 2018, and we stepped into our current editorial roles in 2019.

To sustain the new journal, most articles in the first four years were commissioned by the editor-in-chief. However, the number of unsolicited submissions increased in the late 1980s and early 1990s under David Phillipson, who continued to commission articles to “fill important gaps in coverage” (Phillipson, this issue). The overwhelming majority of articles published since 1996 have originated from unsolicited manuscripts, even as successive editors have worked hard to promote the journal by mentoring and encouraging younger scholars to publish their research while also commissioning forums to discuss topical issues in African archaeology. One of our own contributions to these initiatives is the Usable Past forum (eg., Chirikure et al., 2021; Logan et al., 2019).

Over the past 40 years (excluding a hiatus in 1995), *AAR* has published 724 articles. As summarized in Table 1, these fall into the following categories: (1) editorials commenting on papers in the current issue or broader issues in African archaeology; (2) original articles integrating archaeological data, methods, and/or theories to address specific research questions; (3) research reports presenting results from fieldwork or laboratory analysis; (4) book/exhibit reviews of recent scholarly outputs for academic and public audiences; (5) forums discussing current debates or trends in archaeological methods and practice; (6) interviews with senior scholars; (7) obituaries of professional archaeologists; and (8) announcements/commentaries on miscellaneous issues in African archaeology and heritage.

Temporal trends in these publications emphasize the long-standing importance of *AAR* within the discipline. As illustrated in Fig. 1, the annual number of publications held remarkably steady for 25 years, then nearly quadrupled from an average of 11.5 in 2003–2007 to 40.6 in 2018–2022. On the one hand, these numbers match the recent growth of publishing in African archaeology, including the creation of the *Journal of African Archaeology* in 2003 and the expansion of *Azania* into a continent-wide and multi-issue journal in 2009 (Lane & Reid, 2015). On the other hand, this increase in the number of articles attests to the work of successive *AAR* editors to make the journal the premier place for publishing African archaeology materials. In the next two sections, we

**Table 1** Summary of AAR publication types by five-year period

Years	Peer-Reviewed Publications				Editor-Reviewed Publications					Total
	Original article	Research report	Review article	Book/exhibit review	Editorial	Forum	Interview	Obituary	Announcement/commentary	
1983–1987	46		3	1	5			2		57
1988–1992	30		1	4	4					39
1993–1997	33		1	9	4	5		1	1	54
1998–2002	38			21		9		3	1	72
2003–2007	31			21		1		4		57
2008–2012	56	1	3	22	7		1	1	2	93
2013–2017	109		13	17	9			1		149
2018–2022	104	2	9	70	10	4	3	1		203
Total	447	3	30	165	39	19	4	13	4	724

consider how these interwoven trends—the growth of African archaeology as a discipline and *AAR* as an intellectual space—relate to the research themes and author demographics of peer-reviewed publications in the journal.

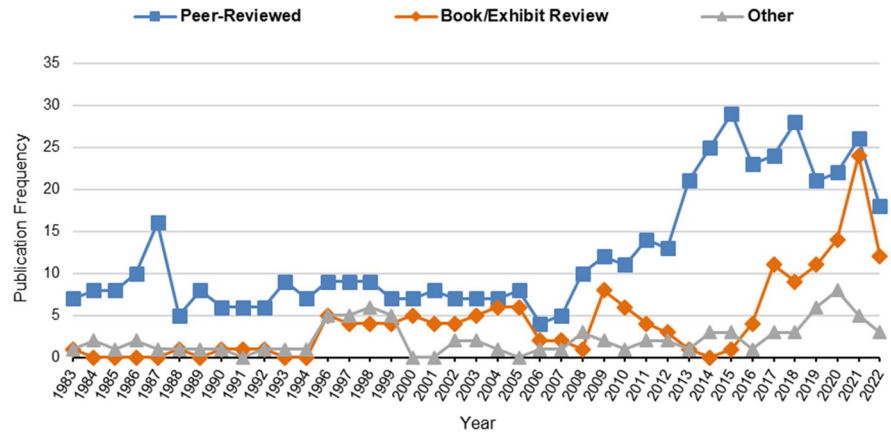
In what follows, we survey the contributions of *AAR* to currents in archaeological theory, method, and practice through an exploratory analysis of publication trends over the past four decades. Following similar studies in other archaeology journals (e.g., Bardolph, 2014; Claassen et al., 1999; Eerkens, 2003; Ford & Hundt, 1994; Fulkerson & Tushingham, 2019; Gero, 1985; Hanscam & Witcher, 2023; Harry et al., 2003; Rautman, 2012; Victor & Beaudry, 1992), we consider both the foci of research in peer-reviewed papers and the demographics of their authorship, particularly gender and nationality. Even as these data illuminate the specific roles of *AAR* in African archaeology, they also help us to chart the broader history of our discipline and stimulate critical conversations about its future.

## Research Themes

Globally, the past four decades have witnessed the incredible diversification of archaeology from a field of study grounded in culture historical and scientific epistemologies, to one now encompassing a broad array of theories, methods, practices, and priorities shared with other disciplines across the humanities and social and natural sciences (Johnson, 2020; Trigger, 2006). This diversity continues to move archaeology further from its colonial roots and keep the discipline vital for interpreting the human past at multiple spatial, temporal, and social scales—from local experiences of specific events to global processes over the *longue-durée*.

African archaeology has contributed to this global trajectory in several ways. First, Africa has the deepest archaeological record in the world, extending back to the first stone tools as early as 3.3 million years ago (Lewis & Harmand, 2016). This makes archaeology on the continent essential for answering key questions and writing grand narratives about human origins in relation to ecology, technology, communication, and cognition (Barham & Mitchell, 2008; Kusimba, 2003). For later periods, African archaeology offers unique case studies for the major transitions in later

**Fig. 1** Annual trends in the frequencies of publication types in AAR (1983–2022)



(pre)history, including the origins of food production, technological innovations such as iron metallurgy, and the emergence of complex societies and cities (Connah, 1998; Shaw et al., 1993). Beyond its sheer depth, the spatio-temporal diversity of the African archaeological record has enabled significant contributions to theoretical developments on and beyond the continent (Wynne-Jones & Fleisher, 2015). These include challenges to meta-narratives of human history predicated on evolutionary logics (Stahl, 2005), as well as critical discussions of gender (Kent, 1998), social complexity and power (Fleisher & Wynne-Jones, 2010; McIntosh, 1999), global entanglements (DeCorse, 2001; Ogundiran & Falola 2007), and colonialism (Richard, 2015).

African archaeology has also led the way with the innovation and application of new methods and practices. Building on a long history of interdisciplinarity (Robertshaw, 1990), archaeologists working in Africa have made critical use of technical advances in material and environmental sciences (McIntosh et al., 2015; McIntosh, 2022), geospatial technologies (Klehm & Gokee, 2020), and genetics (Gifford-Gonzalez, 2013; Prendergast et al., 2022) to study the interplay between past ecologies, technologies, and societies. At the same time, Africanists have made significant strides in recent years with sophisticated approaches for integrating history, ethnography, and linguistics with archaeology (e.g., Chirikure, 2020; de Luna et al., 2012; Ogundiran, 2020a; Schmidt, 2006; Schoenbrun, 1998; Stahl, 2001)—with potential applications for heritage management (Ndoro et al., 2018; Schmidt & Pikirayi, 2016) and sustainable development (Chirikure et al., 2021; Logan

et al., 2019). More broadly, African archaeology has been at the forefront of moves to decolonize the discipline by bringing local and indigenous voices into the creation and communication of historical knowledge (Schmidt, 2009), while also working towards achieving equity in the practice of archaeology (e.g., Thondhlana et al., 2022).

How has AAR contributed to these wider trends? We can begin to answer this question by looking at thematic trends across the 480 peer-reviewed papers (original articles, research reports, and review articles) published in the journal between 1983 and 2022. For this, we first gathered the metadata for these papers from our current publisher, Springer Nature. Although these only gave us the article title and author(s) for the first twelve volumes of AAR (1983–1994), they included abstracts, keywords, author affiliations, and funding sources for all the subsequent volumes (1996–2022). After using these data to build an Access database, we then set about the task of classifying the geographic, temporal, methodological, and topical foci for each paper.

Beginning with geographic focus (Table 2), we aimed to identify the country or countries of origin for the primary archaeological data for each paper. For those comparing data from four or more countries (usually review articles), we simply recorded region and continent. Although these geographic designations are imperfect—some national borders are contested, and regional boundaries are somewhat arbitrary—they nevertheless provide a frame for sketching the broad spatial contours of archaeological research across Africa, at least as published in AAR.

**Table 2** Geographic classification scheme for peer-reviewed articles in *AAR*

<b>Africa</b>	<i>East Africa</i>	<i>North Africa</i>	<i>West Africa</i>	<b>Americas</b>
<i>Central Africa</i>	Burundi	Algeria	Benin	North America
Angola	Comoros	Egypt	Burkina Faso	South America
Cameroon	Djibouti	Libya	Cabo Verde	<b>Asia</b>
Central African Rep.	Eritrea	Mauritania	Canary Islands	West Asia
Chad	Ethiopia	Morocco/Western Sahara	Côte d'Ivoire	South Asia
Congo	Kenya	Sudan	Gambia	East Asia
DR Congo	Madagascar	Tunisia	Ghana	<b>Europe</b>
Equatorial Guinea	Malawi	<i>Southern Africa</i>	Guinea	<b>Oceania</b>
Gabon	Mauritius	Botswana	Guinea-Bissau	
Rwanda	Mozambique	Eswatini	Liberia	
Sao Tome and Principe	Seychelles	Lesotho	Mali	
Zambia	Somalia/Somaliland	Namibia	Niger	
	South Sudan	South Africa	Nigeria	
	Tanzania	Zimbabwe	Senegal	
	Uganda		Sierra Leone	
			Togo	

For temporal focus, we first scanned each article title and abstract for references to the broad archaeological horizon(s), such as Middle Stone Age or Iron Age, while ignoring terms for regional phases or cultures. Because the dates for these horizons vary across Africa, we also recorded the geological time covered in each article according to current subdivisions of the Pleistocene and Holocene epochs (see Table 3 Head et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2018). Based on the chronological resolution of most archaeological data from the late Holocene, we further divided

**Table 3** Temporal classification scheme for peer-reviewed articles in *AAR*

Geological epoch
Pliocene (5.3–2.6 ma)
Pleistocene, Early Gelasian (2.6–1.8 ma)
Pleistocene, Early Calabrian (1.8–0.77 ma)
Pleistocene, Middle (774–129 ka)
Pleistocene, Late (129–11.7 ka)
Holocene, Early (11.7–8.2 ka)
Holocene, Middle (8.2–4.2 ka)
Holocene, Late (4.2–0 ka)
4200–3000 BP
3000–2500 BP
2500–2000 BP
2000–1500 BP
1500–1000 BP
1000–500 BP
500–100 BP
100 BP–present
Present

this sub-epoch into periods of one to seven centuries. We use “present” to denote articles focusing on contemporary issues in archaeological practice, such as heritage management, museum curation, and methodological innovations and training.

For methodological focus, we relied on abstracts and keywords to identify the primary techniques used to generate data—whether from the archaeological record, historical sources, ethnographic contexts, and/or secondary literature. We then grouped these techniques into related sets of methods (Table 4) to better enable comparison over time and between authors. We adopted a similar strategy for topical focus by extracting key terms from each article, then organizing them into hierarchical sets of related concepts (Table 5).

## Space and Time

What do the spatial and temporal foci of peer-reviewed articles in *AAR* reveal about both the role of the journal in African archaeology and broader trends in the discipline? Not surprisingly, research coverage is uneven across the continent (Fig. 2). Some countries, such as South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania, are perennial “hotspots” for research published in *AAR*, while others, mostly in West and Central Africa, have never featured in the journal. A steady stream of articles about East African archaeology makes this the most-published region in *AAR*, but other regional contributions have shifted through time (Fig. 3). For example, there were

**Table 4** Methods classification scheme for peer-reviewed articles in *AAR*

Method	Examples
<b>Dating methods</b>	
Absolute	Radiocarbon dating, TL dating
Relative dating	Seriation
<b>Ethnographic and historical methods</b>	
Ethnoarchaeology	Ethnoarchaeology, Experimental archaeology
Ethnography	Ethnographic interviews, Participant observation
History	Archival research, Epigraphy, Oral history collection
<b>Field methods</b>	
Architecture analysis	
Digital documentation	Digital photography, Photogrammetry
Excavation	Horizontal excavation, Vertical excavation
Geoarchaeology	Geochemical analysis, Micromorphology
Survey	Pedestrian survey, Surface collection
<b>Laboratory methods</b>	
Archaeobotany	Anthracological analysis, Macrobotanical analysis
Archaeozoology	Macrofaunal analysis, ZooMS
Archaeogenetics	aDNA analysis, DNA analysis
Artifact analysis	
<i>Chipped stone</i>	
<i>Pottery</i>	
<i>Other</i>	Bone tool analysis, Glass beads analysis
Bioarchaeology	Fossil morphometric analysis, Human osteology
Microscopy/spectrometry	LA-ICP-MS, Petrographic analysis
<b>Literature review</b>	
<b>Public archaeology</b>	Community archaeology, Public outreach
<b>Spatial methods</b>	Aerial/spaceborne imaging, GIS

few articles focusing on Southern Africa in the first five issues of *AAR* (1983–1987), but these account for 27% of articles in the past ten issues (2013–2022). Contributions from Central Africa, on the other hand, have gradually declined from 14% in 1983–1987 to 5% in recent years.

These regional trends and disparities have several likely causes, beginning with the varying potential for local archaeological records to address research questions of global interest (e.g., social complexity in Egypt and Nigeria, human origins in Tanzania and South Africa). Of course, research output also depends on political stability, infrastructure, and institutional support, which differ across Africa according to the colonial legacy and postcolonial history of each country. Along these same lines, Fig. 2 appears to show a general publication bias in favor of Anglophone countries relative to Francophone, Lusophone,

and Arabophone ones (since 1992, *AAR* only publishes in English).

Interestingly, the broad temporal foci of *AAR* articles have remained consistent over the past 40 years (Fig. 4a). Articles about Late Pleistocene, Early Holocene, or Middle Holocene archaeology were usually most frequent (10–31%), while those about the Early or Middle Pleistocene have been poorly represented since the early 1990s (< 10%), perhaps because scholars often aim to publish this research in natural science or paleoanthropology journals. Although publication rates for research about Late Holocene archaeology have held steady at 10–20%, trends within this sub-epoch (Fig. 4b) may relate to the shifting popularity of specific research themes (see below). For example, many articles in the 1980s focused on the period 4200–2000 BP due to the prevalence of a scientific paradigm for the study of major socio-technical transformations—namely the spread

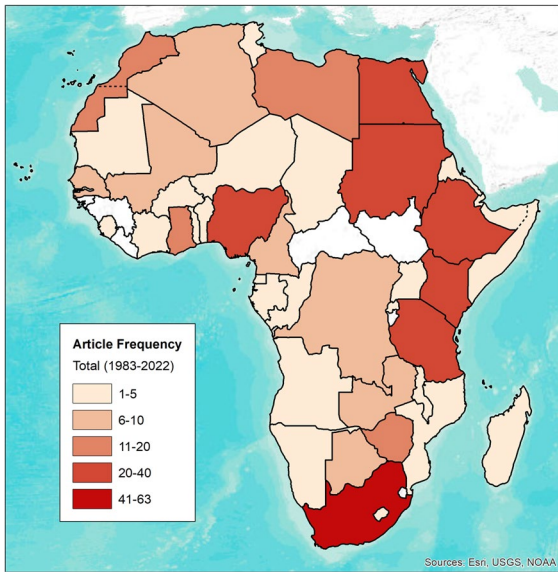
**Table 5** Topical classification scheme for peer-reviewed articles in *AAR* (1983–2022)

Topic	Examples
<b>Archaeology</b>	
History of	
Method/theory	Archaeometallurgy, Postcolonial archaeology
Practice	Cultural heritage management, Museums, Public education
Systematics	Artifact classification, Regional chronology
<b>Geography/Economics</b>	
Human Ecology	Demography, Domestication, Human behavioral ecology
Paleoenvironment	Paleoclimate, Paleoenvironment
Process	Human migration, Sedentism, Technological diffusion/dispersal
Spatial organization	Local (site), Regional (settlement patterns)
Subsistence	Diet, Farming, Foraging, Herding, Plant processing
Trade/exchange	Regional exchange networks, Long-distance trade
<b>Paleoanthropology</b>	
Hominin evolution	Anatomically modern humans, Behavioral modernity
Systematics	Phylogenetics
<b>Society/culture</b>	
Identity	African diaspora, Ethnicity, Gender, Status
Organization	Agency, Kinship, Political economy
Process	Interregional interaction, Monumentality, Urbanism
Religion/ideology	Kingship, Ritual, Syncretism
Semiosis	Social memory, Symbolism
<b>Technology</b>	
Bead	Bead production, Personal adornment
Bone/ivory	Bone tool use, Ivory production
Lithic	Raw material procurement, Chipped stone reduction
Metallurgy	Gold mining, Iron smelting, Copper-alloy casting
Pottery	Pottery production, Pottery decoration
Other	Medicine, Pyrotechnology, Textiles, Watercraft

of food production, iron metallurgy, and Bantu languages—beginning at this time (e.g., Haaland, 1992; Holl, 1985; Oslisly & Peyrot, 1992). Meanwhile, a call by Posnansky and DeCorse (1986) for archaeology to engage with more recent African pasts appears to have been quite effective: Papers focusing on the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries (500–100 BP) tripled from 6% of peer-reviewed articles in 1983–1992 to 18% in 1993–2002 (e.g., Goucher & Schoenbrun, 1993; Kinahan, 1996). Beyond these subtle trends, the ongoing publication of topics from the Pleistocene to the present day reveals the resistance of *AAR* to specialization. The journal has been and continues to be a resource for scholars looking to publish the full sweep of human (and hominin) history in Africa.

## Methods and Topics

The diverse methods and topics covered in *AAR* further highlight the role of the journal in showcasing the breadth and depth of African archaeology. Figure 5, for example, shows that published research has featured a wide range of methods, with laboratory methods topping the chart (58%). Ethnographic and historical methods have also been well-represented, though these have declined after appearing in 35% of published articles in 2008–2012. Other recent trends include an increase in the rate of publications with spatial methods, which account for 14% of the articles in the past five years, due to the growing availability of GIS and other geospatial technologies to address regional-scale questions, and a special issue on this topic published in March 2020 (Klehm & Gokee,



**Fig. 2** Map of geographic focus (country) frequencies for peer-reviewed articles in AAR (1983–2022)

2020). Meanwhile, the rate of articles involving public archaeology has grown to 10% over the last 20 years (e.g., Arthur et al., 2020; Bushozi, 2022; Mire, 2007), presumably in response to critical reflection on archaeological practice (see below). Ironically, given the name of the journal, the percentage of literature reviews has dropped steadily since 1997, reflecting the fact that AAR editors were no longer actively commissioning manuscripts in this category.

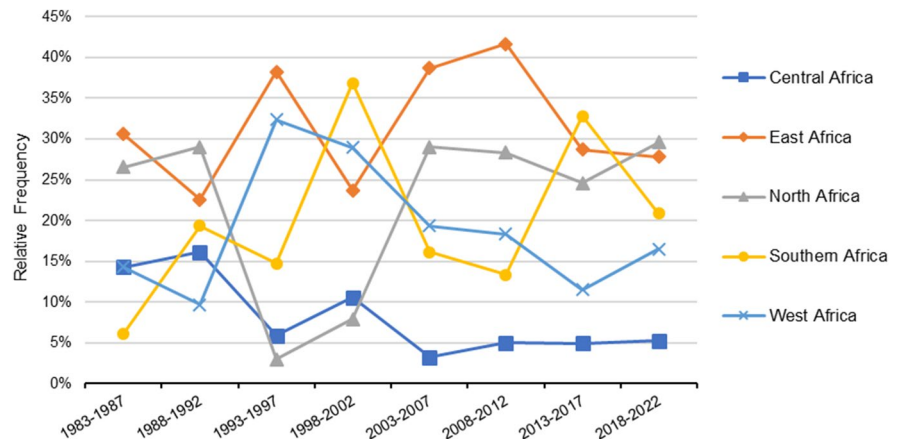
A closer look at field methods reveals the enduring importance of many techniques in African archaeology, as well as the impact of some recent analytical

advances (Fig. 6a). Excavation and survey, for example, are consistently well-represented in published articles, particularly in comparison to geoarchaeology and architectural analysis. Articles discussing digital documentation, however, have grown rapidly to account for 10% of those published in the past five years, mainly in a special issue on “Rock Art and Digital Practice” (Anderson et al., 2018). This illustrates the usefulness of 3D imaging applications for archaeologists, as well as the commitment of AAR to publishing this work for the benefit of scholarly and public audiences.

Regarding laboratory methods (Fig. 6b, c), the analyses of chipped stone, ceramic, and other artifacts have featured regularly in the journal over the years. Recently, the proportion of articles using microscopy and/or spectrometry climbed to 13% in 2018–2022, consistent with the growing use of these techniques to study artifact and rock art production in African archaeology (e.g., Bradfield, 2020; García-Heras et al., 2021; Hamdan et al., 2021; Orijemie et al., 2021). Bioarchaeological methods for the study of human remains (Fig. 6c) have never featured in more than 5% of AAR articles in any five-year window, perhaps because authors aim to publish this research in more specialized journals.

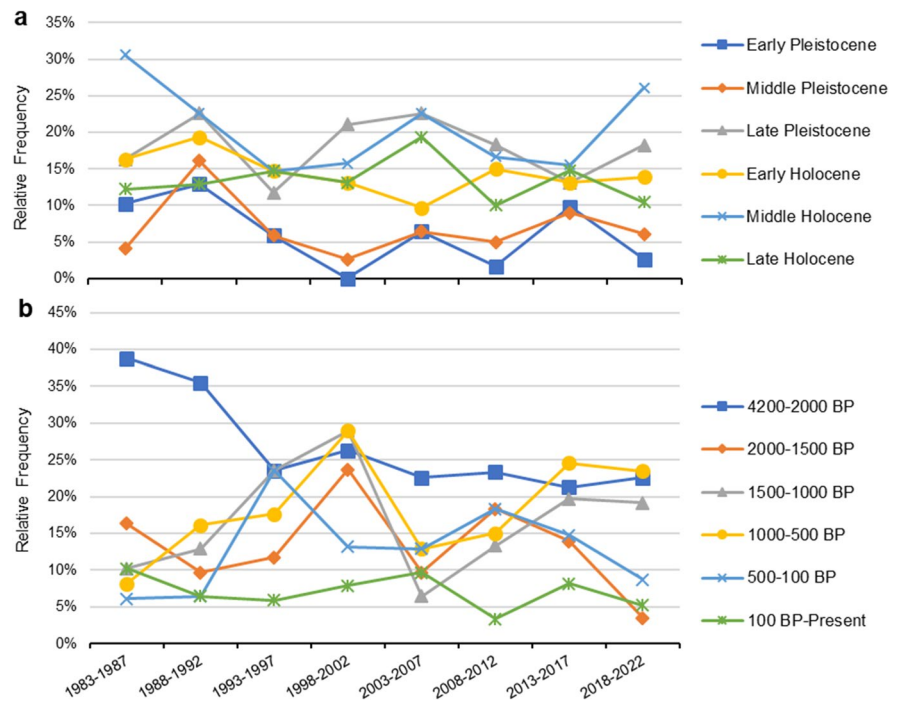
Of course, research methods are chosen to fit specific topics, themselves shaped by methodological advances and intellectual movements in and beyond Africa. Although the relative ranking of the topics addressed in AAR articles has remained fairly consistent (Fig. 7), a closer look at subtopics can help to explain some of their long-term ups and downs. For example, Fig. 8a illustrates the trends for subtopics

**Fig. 3** Five-year trends in the relative frequencies of geographic focus (region) for peer-reviewed articles in AAR (1983–2022)

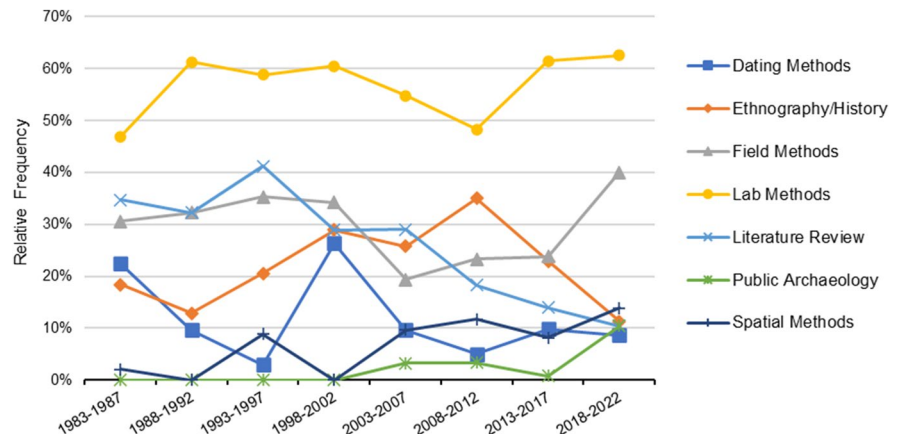




**Fig. 4** Five-year trends in the relative frequencies of temporal focus for peer-reviewed articles in *AAR* (1983–2022): **a** Pleistocene-Holocene epochs, **b** Late Holocene epoch



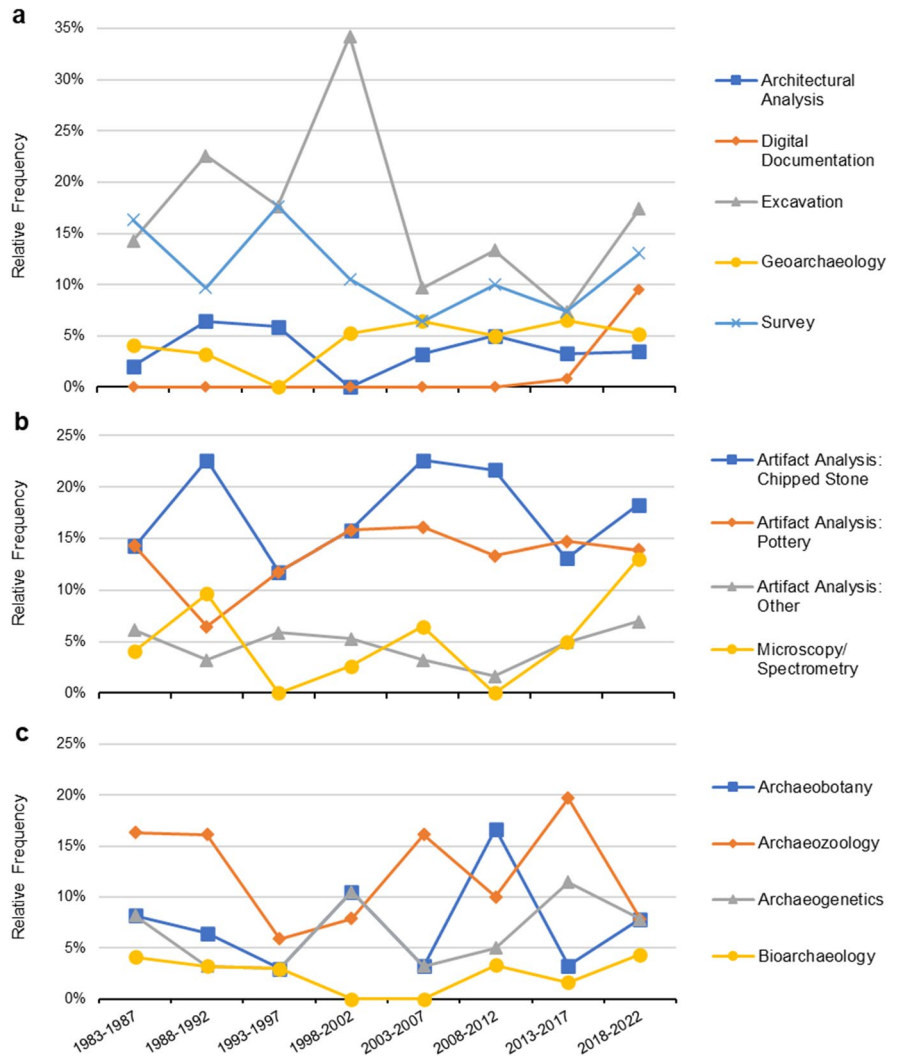
**Fig. 5** Five-year trends in the relative frequencies of methods for peer-reviewed articles in *AAR* (1983–2022)



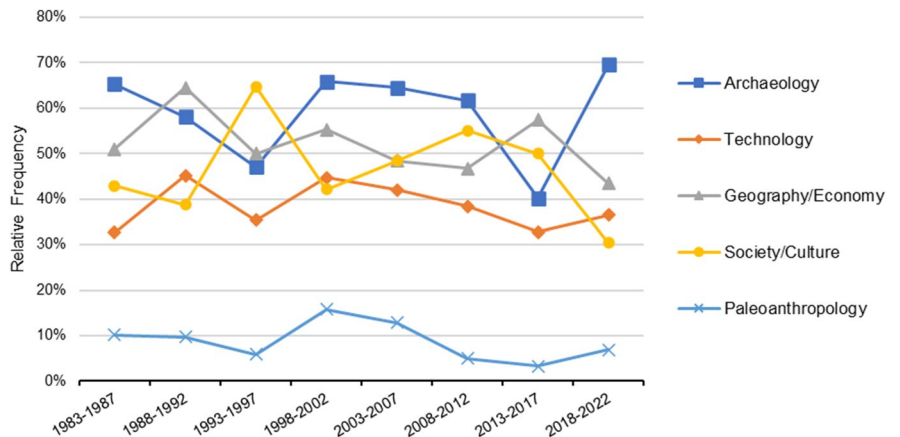
in “Archaeology” related to the history, methods, theories, and practices of the discipline. Here, we can see that the percentage of articles about the history of research in particular regions has remained below 5% since 1993, likely reflecting a fall in the number of literature review and synthesis papers (see above). However, articles engaging with systematics (the organization of archaeological data in space and time) and/or method and theory (the creation and interpretation of these data) have higher percentages. Although these proportions have largely paralleled

one another over the years, those papers concerned with systematics have declined from a high of 43% in 1983–1987, while those concerned with method and theory rose to 42% in 2018–2022. The past five years also saw the rate of articles emphasizing archaeological practice reach a new high of 17%. Altogether, these trends illustrate a growing appreciation for more theoretically-informed research and active engagement with public education, community relations, and heritage management in African archaeology—trends that we hope will continue into the future.

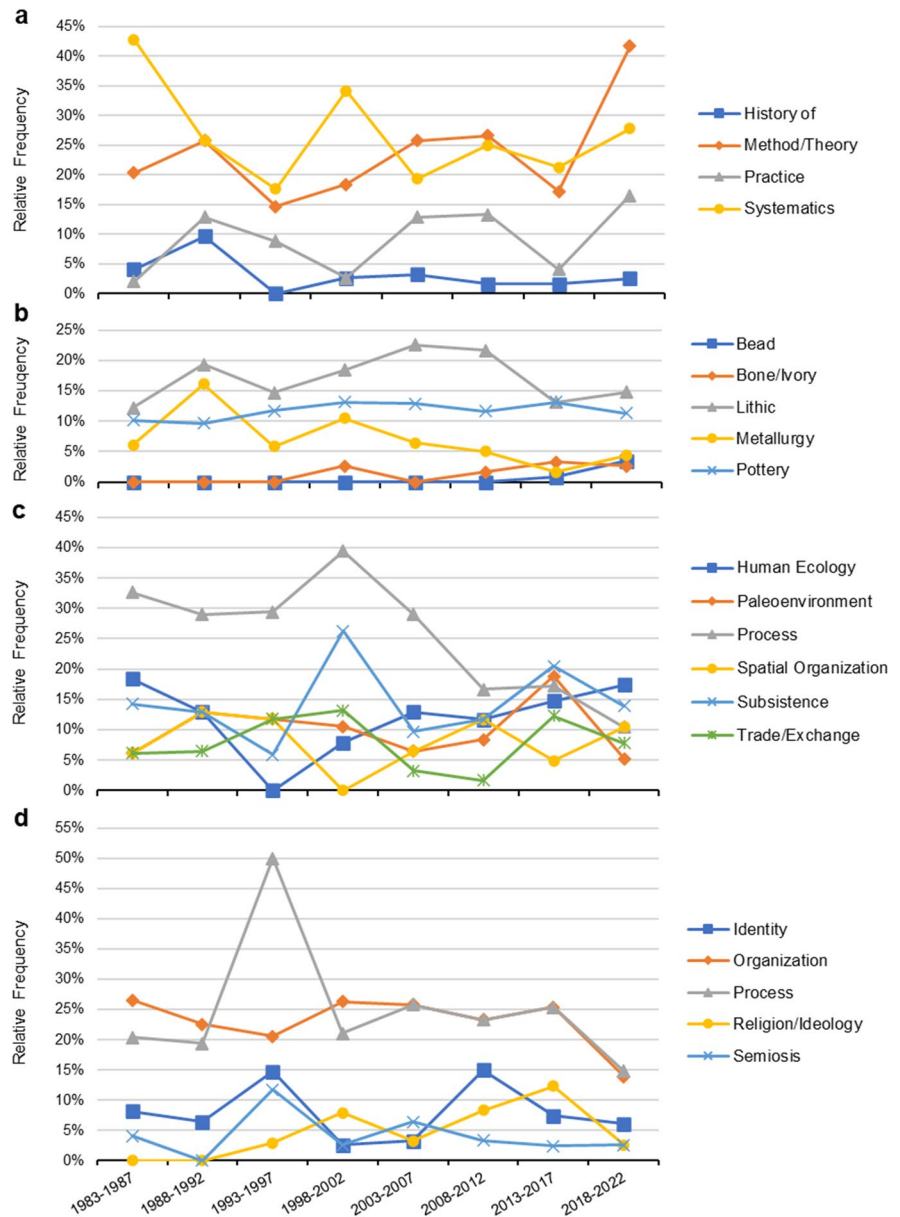
**Fig. 6** Five-year trends in the relative frequencies of select sub-methods for peer-reviewed articles in AAR (1983–2022): **a** field methods, **b** laboratory methods for inorganic materials, **c** laboratory methods for organic materials



**Fig. 7** Five-year trends in the relative frequencies of topical themes for peer-reviewed articles in AAR (1983–2022)



**Fig. 8** Five-year trends in the relative frequencies of select sub-topical themes for peer-reviewed articles in *AAR* (1983–2022): **a** Archaeology subtopics, **b** Technology subtopics, **c** Geography/economy subtopics, **d** Society/culture subtopics



For subtopics in “Technology” (Fig. 8b), there has been a longstanding interest in questions about the production and use of pottery and chipped stone tools. This is not surprising given the prevalence of these materials in the archaeological record and the accessibility of methods for their macroscopic and microscopic analysis. Interestingly, the rates of articles discussing bone tool and bead production have both gradually increased from 0% in 1983–1992 to 3% in 2018–2022, perhaps owing to the growing availability of microscopy and spectrometry methods

for their analysis (see above). In contrast, the proportion of articles with a focus on metallurgy has steadily dropped from a high of 16% in 1988–1992 to 2–4% over the past decade.

Most subtopics in “Geography/environment” (Fig. 8c) and “Society/Culture” (Fig. 8d) have remained well-represented in *AAR* due to the fundamental importance of research on paleoenvironment, subsistence, trade/exchange, and social organization and processes in many archaeological projects. One notable trend, however, is the declining rate of articles

addressing geographic processes (e.g., technological transfer and human migration) since 2002. Another is a spike in papers focusing on social processes (e.g., interregional interaction, colonialism, and resistance) in 1993–1997—a pattern explained by both the influx of historical archaeology during this period (see above) and the response to post-processual calls for archaeological interrogations of power and agency. This response may also explain a corresponding bump in the percentages of papers addressing social identity and semiosis (e.g., symbolism and memory) in 1993–1997 and a gradual increase in the following years for those engaging with religion/ideology.

### Authorship

Recent trends in the practice of African archaeology are being shaped by efforts to decolonize the discipline through collaborative research with local communities and critical reflection on power and epistemology among archaeologists—a topic that has been addressed in a number of *AAR* forums (e.g., Aremu, 1999; Chirikure et al., 2021; Ogundiran, 2020b; Pwiti & Ndor, 1999; Sowunmi, 1998; Thondhlana et al., 2022). In this same spirit, we now turn to consider the demographics of authorship in the journal. We began by populating our database with the metadata from Springer Nature (see above), which included the author names ( $n = 841$ ) for every peer-reviewed article, as well as institutional affiliation(s) for those published in 1996 or later. We then categorized the individual contributions to each paper as either “first author” or “additional author” recognizing that lead authorship usually holds greater prestige within the academic community.

Neither Springer Nature nor previous publishers of *AAR* collect additional information about author demographics, so we had to do this work ourselves. Given the challenges and uncertainties of extracting these data from public records, we focused on recording only two attributes for each author—gender and nationality—based on our personal familiarity with the authors and/or biographical information available online (e.g., curriculum vita, university webpage, and ResearchGate profile). For gender, we identified authors as either male or female based on strongly gendered given names or the use of their pronouns in published materials (e.g., Bardolph,

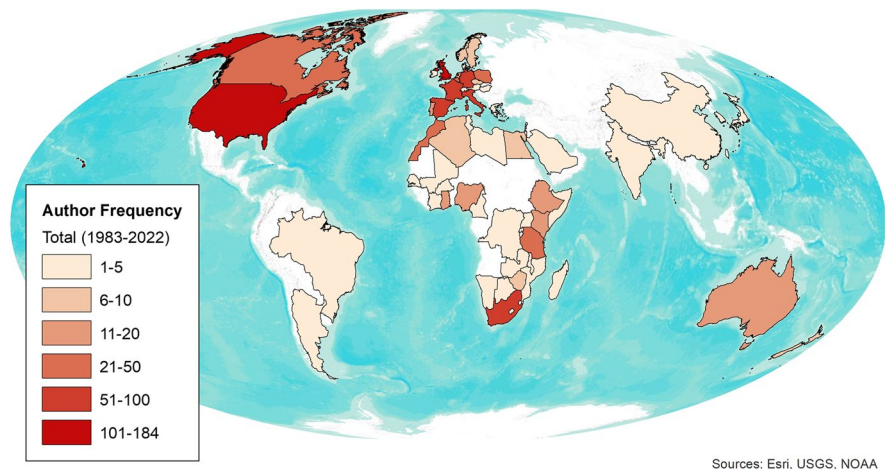
2014; Beaudry & White, 1994; Claassen et al., 1999; Ford & Hundt, 1994; Fulkerson & Tushingham, 2019; Gero, 1985; Hanscam & Witcher, 2023; Harry et al., 2003). For nationality, we relied on direct references to national origins and/or citizenship in biographical records. We recognize that a survey would provide more accurate data on the author’s gender and nationality, as well as intersections between these and other identities (Heath-Stout, 2020). Nevertheless, we were able to record gender for 813 authors (97%) and nationality for 759 authors (90%) of the peer-reviewed articles in *AAR*.

### Nationality

*AAR* author nationalities are unevenly distributed across the globe, with most concentrated in Western Europe, North America, Oceania, and Africa (Fig. 9). As summarized in Table 6., this pattern holds for both first authorship ( $n = 452$ )—Europe (38%), Americas (28%), and Africa (30%)—and additional authorship ( $n = 598$ )—Europe (56%), Americas (18%), and Africa (22%). The greater proportion of Europeans in this latter role could represent a tendency towards methodological specialization and collaboration on large research teams, in comparison to many North American and African archaeologists with more generalized training. Looking at the historical trends behind these numbers (Fig. 10a), we find that the rates of articles with first authors from North America and Oceania have slightly declined since 1998–2002, while those with European, Asian, and African first authors have either gone up or held steady.

A closer look at the geography of first authorship shows that African scholars represent only 28 countries, many of which are relative “hot spots” for archaeological research, such as Morocco, Nigeria, Tanzania, and South Africa (see Fig. 2). Regionally, first authors from countries in Central and North Africa are poorly represented in *AAR*, never accounting for more than 5% of the peer-reviewed papers in any five-year period (Fig. 10b). Despite some ups and downs, there were similar publication rates for first authors from West (13%), East (15%), and Southern Africa (11%) from 1993 to 2007, but these have diverged over the past 15 years as the rates for authors from West (3%) and East Africa (9%) have declined relative to those from Southern Africa (15%). As for the geography of research (see above), these patterns

**Fig. 9** Map of first and additional author nationality frequencies for peer-reviewed articles in *AAR* (1983–2022)



represent the submission rates from each country which, in turn, reflect country-specific histories of support for archaeology and perhaps the greater attraction of *AAR* for scholars from Anglophone countries. At the same time, the disparities between article publication and authorship for some countries (cf. Fig. 2, Fig. 9) may point to deeper issues of inequity between Africa and the Global North.

For example, a comparison of methodological foci between African and non-African authors (Fig. 11) shows that the former are the first authors on 39–40% of the *AAR* articles involving ethnographic/historical methods, public archaeology, and literature review, but only 25–26% of those involving field, laboratory, and spatial methods. Meanwhile, European first authors have contributed more articles involving field methods (46%), laboratory/dating methods (38%), and public archaeology (47%), while those from the Americas have contributed more using spatial methods (41%). Although these methodological foci do not strongly determine topical ones (Fig. 12), they may indicate differential access to the financial resources and training required for fieldwork and laboratory analyses, enabling scholars from the Global North to undertake and publish more of this research—a perennial problem discussed in a recent *AAR* forum about the practice of archaeological science in Africa (Thondhlana et al., 2022).

## Gender

Gendered patterns of authorship in *AAR* reveal a persistent underrepresentation of women (Fig. 13). The combined percentages of first and additional female authors have gradually climbed from 21% in 1983–1987 to 37% in 2018–2022, comparable to trends in *Azania* (Lane & Reid, 2015). A recent study of female first authorship rates in African archaeology journals by Cheryl Claassen (2023) also found that female first authorship rates in *AAR* were quite similar to those for both *Azania* (38–40%) and *Journal of African Archaeology* (39–40%) from 2014 to 2021. Unfortunately, these rates parallel the gender disparities observed in other archaeological journals where female authorship has, with few exceptions, remained around 20–40% over the past four decades (see Fig. 2 in Hanscam & Witcher, 2023).

Lacking independent data on gender demographics in the African archaeology community, we can only suggest some possible explanations for these trends. On the one hand, the relative growth in *AAR* articles with female authors is likely due to an increase in the number of women pursuing postdoctoral degrees and academic careers in archaeology. In North America, for example, the rates of female PhD recipients in anthropological archaeology programs steadily rose from 41–42% in 1967 to 55–56% in 2015, though men continue to have higher rates of employment in academia

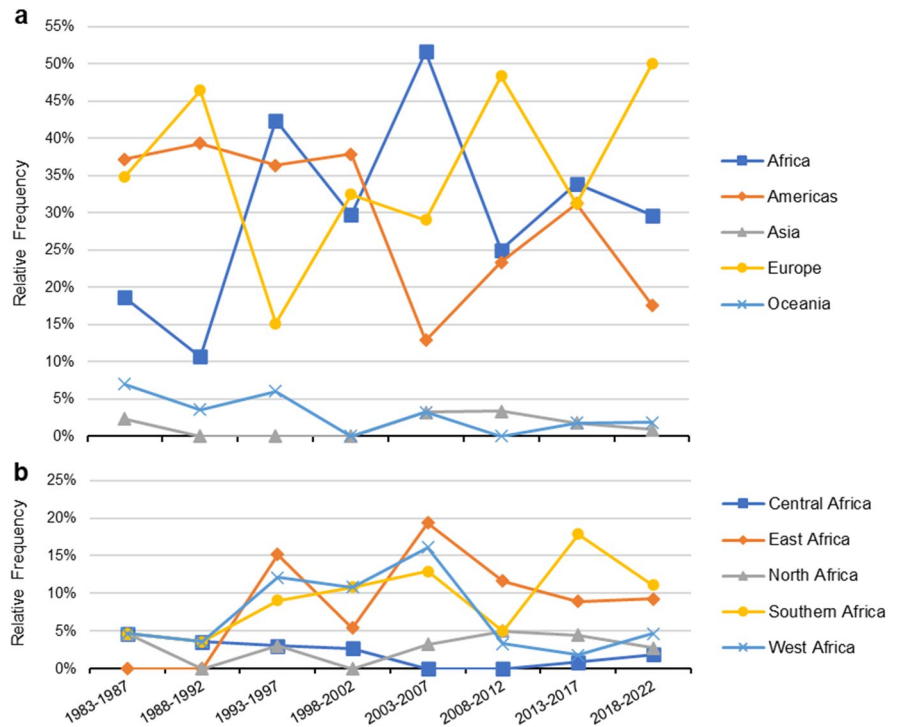
**Table 6.** Summary of authorship nationality frequencies for peer-reviewed articles in AAR (1983–2022)

Africa				Non-Africa			
Region/country	First	Additional	Total	Region/country	First	Additional	Total
<i>Central Africa</i>	8	4	12	<i>Americas</i>	125	105	230
Cameroon	4		4	Argentina		1	1
DR Congo		3	3	Brazil	1		1
Rwanda	1		1	Canada	22	22	44
Zambia	3	1	4	USA	102	82	184
<i>East Africa</i>	40	27	67	<i>Asia</i>	7	12	19
Ethiopia	5	7	12	China	1	2	3
Kenya	9	9	18	India	1		1
Madagascar		1	1	Israel	3	2	5
Malawi		1	1	Japan		1	1
Mozambique		3	3	Lebanon		1	1
Somalia	5		5	Saudi Arabia	1	2	3
Tanzania	20	6	26	South Korea	1	4	5
Uganda	1		1	<i>Europe</i>	172	334	506
<i>North Africa</i>	15	33	48	Austria	1	2	3
Algeria	4	6	10	Belgium	12	21	33
Egypt	7	3	10	Czech Republic	2	5	7
Libya		1	1	Denmark	1	1	2
Morocco	2	22	24	France	15	60	75
Tunisia	2	1	3	Germany	20	33	53
<i>Southern Africa</i>	49	51	100	Greece	1		1
Botswana	2	1	3	Hungary	1		1
Lesotho		3	3	Ireland		1	1
Namibia		1	1	Italy	23	46	69
South Africa	40	43	83	Netherlands	1	9	10
Zimbabwe	7	3	10	Norway	5	1	6
<i>West Africa</i>	25	17	42	Poland	7	14	21
Burkina Faso	1		1	Portugal	3	11	14
Côte d'Ivoire	1		1	Spain	17	63	80
Ghana	8	5	13	Sweden	6	1	7
Mali	3	2	5	Switzerland		3	3
Nigeria	12	8	20	UK	57	63	120
Senegal		2	2	<i>Oceania</i>	11	15	26
				Australia	8	10	18
				New Zealand	3	5	8
<b>Africa total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>Non-Africa total</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>781</b>

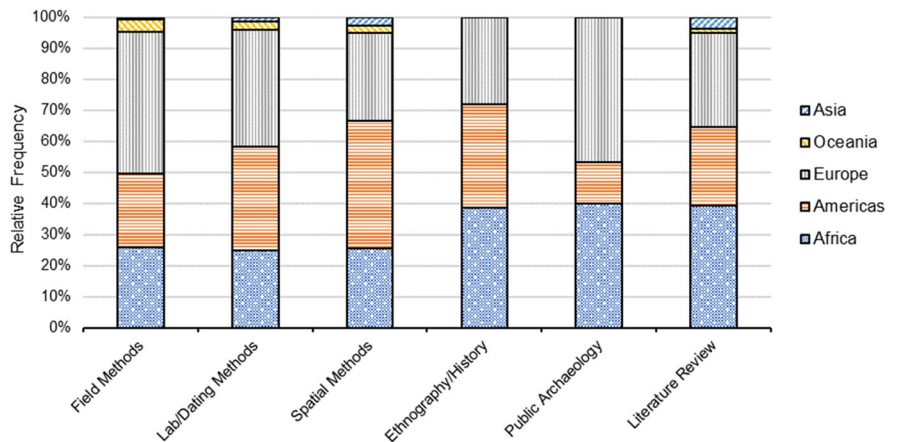
and heritage management (see Fulkerson & Tushingham, 2019, p. 382–385). Here, studies of other archaeology journals have found no evidence for bias against women in the peer-review process; women simply tend to submit fewer manuscripts than men (e.g., Bardolph, 2014; Beaudry & White, 1994; Claassen et al., 1999; Hanscam & Witcher, 2023; Rautman, 2012). We believe this is also the

case for AAR where women were the lead authors on only 25% of the manuscripts sent for review in 2018–2022, but 38% of the articles were published during this same period. In other words, women seem to submit fewer, but higher-quality, manuscripts to the journal. The low rate of submission of articles to AAR by women (compared to men)

**Fig. 10** Five-year trends in the relative frequencies of first author nationality (region) for peer-reviewed articles in AAR (1983–2022): **a** Global region, **b** African region



**Fig. 11** Relative distribution of first author nationality (continent) by methods for peer-reviewed articles in AAR (1983–2022)

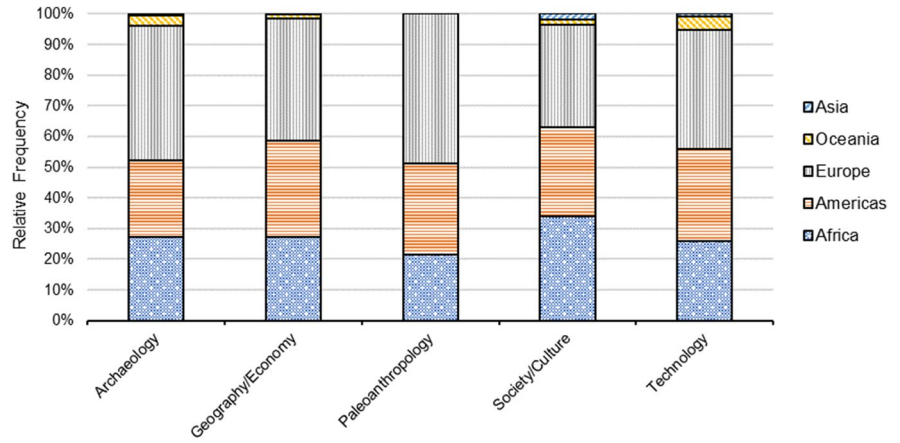


may reflect the lower percentage of women actively employed in archaeology.

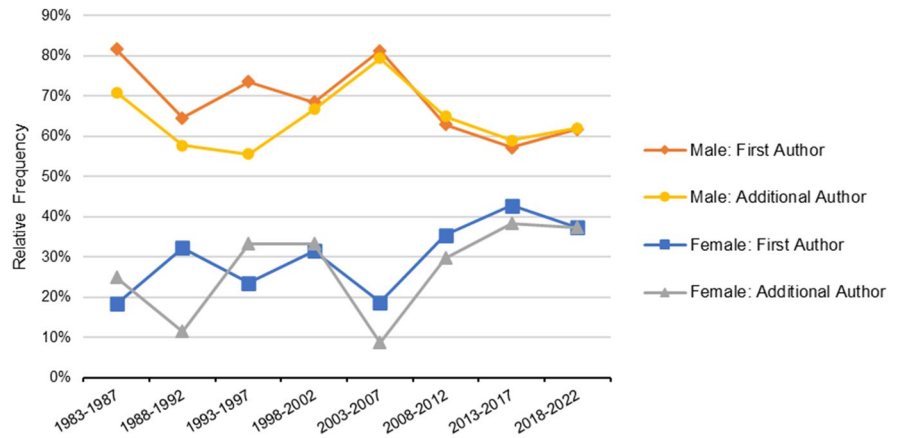
A closer look at intersections between gender and nationality shows that these challenges have been more pronounced for some women than for others (Fig. 14). Among North American first authors, the percentage of women met or surpassed the 50% mark for gender parity in 1993–2002 and again in 2013–2017, before declining slightly to 46% in 2018–2022. Meanwhile, among European

first authors, the percentage of women steadily rose from 10% in 1993–1997 to 39% in 2018–2022. In contrast, the proportion of women among African first authors grew slowly from 13% to 23% over this same period, largely due to more female authors from East, North, and Southern Africa (Fig. 15). Our data suggest that women continue to experience inequities in research and publishing about African archaeology, but African women, particularly those

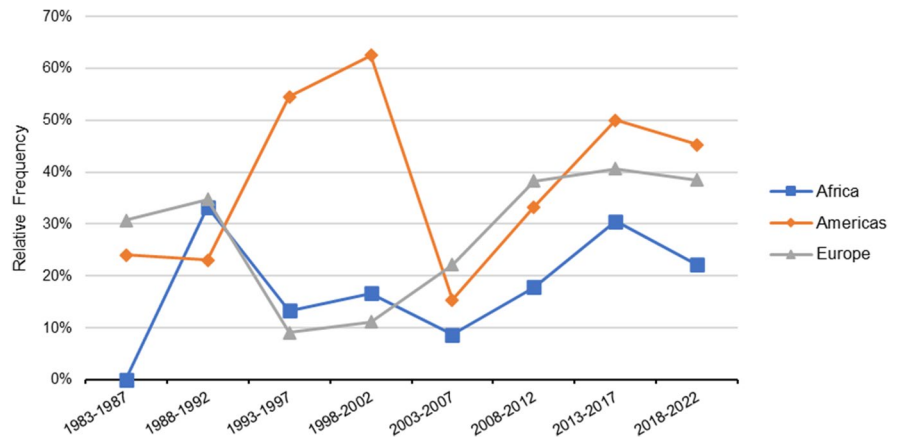
**Fig. 12** Relative distribution of first author nationality (continent) by topical focus for peer-reviewed articles in AAR (1983–2022)



**Fig. 13** Five-year trends in the relative frequencies of first and additional author gender for peer-reviewed articles in AAR (1983–2022)



**Fig. 14** Five-year trends in the relative frequencies of female first authors by nationality (continent) for peer-reviewed articles in AAR (1983–2022)



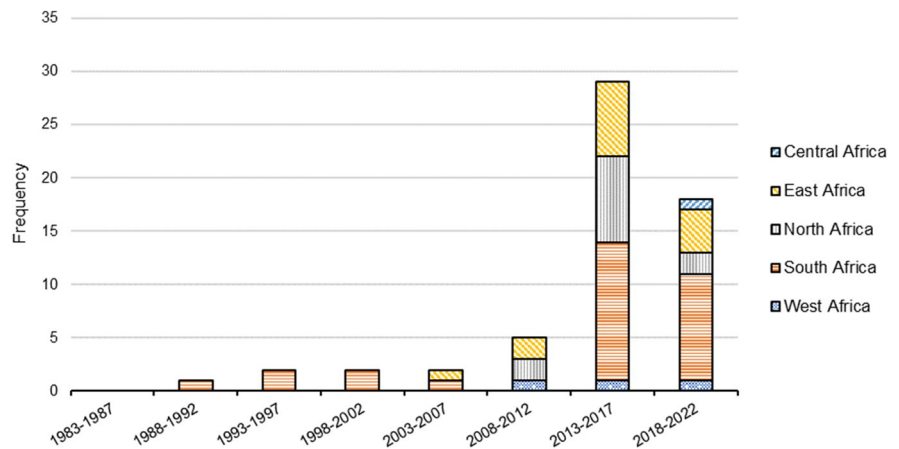
from West and Central Africa, may be experiencing these disparities most acutely.

**Discussion**

The *African Archaeological Review* has, from its inception, made significant contributions to the



**Fig. 15** Five-year trends in the frequencies of female first authors by nationality (region) for peer-reviewed articles in *AAR* (1983–2022)



professionalization of African archaeology, while remaining responsive to the interests of non-professionals through the promotion of articles aimed at public education, pedagogy, and heritage management policies (e.g., Sowunmi, 1998; Sulas et al., 2011). The Usable Past Forum, discussed above, was inaugurated in 2019 to blunt the sharp edges of this professionalization further and communicate the relevance and value of archaeology for addressing contemporary concerns to the public, including policymakers. The upcoming September issue devoted to the pedagogy of archaeology in K-12 education further illustrates the journal's ongoing commitment to sharing knowledge from African archaeology to promote learning about history, civics, science, and social studies by students in Africa and elsewhere.

An interventionist approach has defined the agenda of *AAR* from its inception. Although its contents have mostly focused on disseminating products of original research, the mission of any academic periodical, the journal has also been concerned with the inclusion of the voices and priorities of the local communities in archaeological understanding of the past, advocating for the inter-cultural and multinational collaborative research, providing platforms to discuss ways of improving the professional development of archaeology in African institutions. The successive editorial regimes have initiated programs to bring diverse authors to the journal and make their work visible. Concerns about access to the journal in African countries are a perennial concern and priority, leading to the establishment of the free temporary access program two years ago. This

initiative makes a select number of articles available to the public on a 3-month rotational basis. It provides visibility to the work of Africa-based authors who cannot afford open-access funds and also makes general-interest articles accessible to the global community on a short-term basis.

This review of the themes, methods, and author demographics represented in *AAR* is just the tip of the iceberg. We welcome other approaches to telling the story of the journal. It is certain that the history of African archaeology will be incomplete without considering the contributions of *AAR* to the understanding of Africa's past and present and the continent's emergent future. Happy birthday to all of us in African archaeology.

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**Data Availability** Publication data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author (CG), upon reasonable request. Due to their sensitive nature, authorship data are not available.

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