

As there are seventy separate contributions, quality and interest of individual papers will obviously vary. I would recommend the following papers in particular: Gross on the development of the Swiss Neolithic, which pays particular attention to interregional exchanges and influences; Jacomet et al. on agriculture and plant-gathering around Lake Zürich; Währen's short paper on prehistoric bread and cakes - a commodity recovered from several Swiss wetland sites; the papers by Ruoff, Gross & Ritzmann and Ebenschweiler on recently excavated sites in the Canton of Zürich; Speck and Wyss on sites from the Wauwilermoos, including the comparatively well-known Egolzwil sites; Winiger on sites from Lake Biene, illustrating the high density of pile-built villages around this small lake - between 5 and 13 at any period; Strahm & Wolf on the sites of Yverdon; and Ramseyer on the sites around Lake Murten.

The greatest weakness of this collection of essays is undoubtedly the way in which contributions from the western, French-speaking part of Switzerland are under-represented. One misses in particular a more detailed treatment of the sites of the Canton Neuchâtel, where the past decade has seen some very sizeable excavations, in particular at Auvernier, Cortaillod, Hauterive and St. Blaise. Recent work in the Canton of Zürich is, by contrast, much better documented - possibly a reflection of the geographical location of the exhibition and the continuing slight tension between Switzerland's two main language groups. Nevertheless I can strongly recommend the two volumes to anybody interested in the European Neolithic and Bronze Age and capable of coping with largely German and French papers. They provide a good overview and introduction to the rich wetland sites of the circumalpine region, and although the individual papers are comparatively short, each comes with a list of bibliographical sources for those who seek more extensive information.

Robert Fellner

Vainker, S.J. *Chinese pottery and porcelain: from prehistory to the present.* London: British Museum, 1991. 240pp. £19.95

Published to coincide with the 1991 British Museum exhibition of the same name, this book offers a concise and generally well-presented account of the world's most accomplished ceramic tradition. As early as the 12th century AD China's achievements, technological and aesthetic, had created such a demand as to fuel a wood-fired Industrial Revolution at the potteries of Jingdezhen.

The book is generously illustrated with colour photographs, some of them quite superb. Some prehistoric pots are rendered in sectional drawing, as are the main types of kiln. There is also a series of site location maps. Appendices on clays, glazes and kilns are followed by a glossary, a chronology and a bibliography.

For its length the book is ambitious in its scope, especially in including the various cultural sequences of the Neolithic. However, for that period alone there have been a number of important discoveries in recent years. Hemudu in the east, Peiligang in the north and Zengpiyan in the south. Pottery is now claimed to have begun several thousand years earlier than at the well-known Yangshao site of Banpo. Not surprisingly the earliest dates claimed for

Zengpiyan have been challenged, but something of a consensus has now emerged for a ceramic horizon around 7500 BC.

Archaeological activity has not been confined to prehistoric levels; among the many dynastic tombs opened one has revealed the now-famous 'terracotta soldiers' of the Qin emperor. Excavations have also yielded valuable information on the specialized potteries of the Tang and Song dynasties. Work at the Famensi pagoda's hidden basement and its Tang reliquary room was outstanding in that respect, and the finding of the elusive Ru kiln site was long overdue. In the main it was this new information that inspired both the exhibition and this book, although the author also pays tribute to the technical research work at Oxford by Nigel Wood and others.

The author is a curator of the British Museum's Department of Oriental Antiquities, and it must be said that for a presentation that is basically art-historical, her handling of ceramic technicalities is unusually sound. Further, she not only details the development of technology and decoration but also outlines the changes in the social, political and economic forces of the times. A grasp of these changes is essential to an understanding of how some provincial workshops grew to become industrial centres supplying vast overseas markets.

Possibly because of the wealth of technical explanation there are occasions when (as a potter) I would have chosen other terms, but this is largely a matter of opinion. There are a few more definite lapses, such as describing the jade cong as a cylinder (it is always rectangular). Another is the failure to explain the methods evolved for stacking bowls more closely in the kiln, an important matter when expanding output. Figure 170e is more likely to confuse than inform.

Overall, the relevance of the book is its incorporation of the archaeological and research reports of recent years within the mainstream of established scholarship. The general result is both readable and erudite, as well as being concise. At the very least the book will serve as a fine introductory guide to the time and place which produced most of the world's ceramic history, and many of its most beautiful pots.

Apart from that exceptional pottery, few things are perfect in this world, and on this note I must refer to the imperfections of the opening chapter on the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Although some of these imperfections may be the author's, I prefer to assume that the editing of this chapter was extremely hurried.

The Chronology at the end of the book does not always correspond with the text, and this adds to the confusion as to the earliest pottery dates in China. For example, page 10 "around ten or eleven thousand years ago", page 14 "almost nine thousand years ago" and page 226 (Chronology) "circa 6,500 BC. Again, the Dawenkou culture is in the text as 4300-2400 BC, but in the Chronology as 5800-1500 BC.

The site map for the Neolithic and Bronze Age is so unsatisfactory as to be misleading. To begin with, the Great Wall of China is prominently featured, despite it being an Iron Age construction. The east coast shoreline depicted is that of today, whereas the Neolithic shoreline was much further inland, a difference essential to the understanding of the East Coast cultures.

Many important sites mentioned in the text are not shown on the map; not one of the Hongshan culture sites is marked.

Most readers will first of all look for the key sites of Banpo, Hemudu and Zengpiyan. They will not find them, as the convention of using archaeological site names is seldom observed on this map (for comparison, see the historical map of China issued by National Geographic in the July 1991 issue).

Since the discoveries of recent years it is now obvious that pottery was made at Neolithic sites scattered throughout China, most of them far beyond the area of the first dynasties. Since much earlier it has been equally obvious that there is a sharp contrast to be drawn between potters serving the widely dispersed farming communities, and those who came later and were held as specialists just outside the walls of China's first cities. As there is also a profound difference in the pottery, surely the Neolithic deserves its own map?

Eddie Field

Chris Knight. *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture.* Yale University Press, 1991. 581pp. £40.00.

With the collapse of stalinism, palaeolithic archaeology and anthropology are the only disciplines where one is likely to hear the concept of a 'human revolution' being unabashedly entertained. The emerging consensus appears to be that we did not become 'behaviourally modern' until long after our presumed speciation in Africa between 200,000-130,000. Social anthropology, which one would have expected to have a significant input into such a debate, has been notable for its silence, preferring an entrenched isolationism.

Chris Knight has broken this silence with a model of cultural origins which is itself revolutionary. It is a Marxist model in the tradition of Engels' pamphlet *The origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, but drawing upon the methodological advances provided by sociobiology, structuralism and feminism.

It is a model already creating quite a stir making it to the front page of the *Independent* and Radio 4's 'Woman's Hour', and receiving favourable comments from a wide range of academics including Clive Gamble, Alexander Marshack, Robin Dunbar, Mary Douglas and Marilyn Strahern.

Knight argues that to understand the roots of culture, we have to start with the selfish-gene driven mating systems of the primates and the sociobiological orthodoxy that in the process of hominisation, females became an increasingly reproductively burdened sex.

Evolving Pleistocene females required support from males in provisioning their increasingly large-brained offspring. They minimised male philandering and maximised male parental investment by (a) concealing ovulation, (b) extending receptivity throughout the cycle and (c) synchronising their ovulatory cycles within local groups. Concealed ovulation forced males to stick around throughout the cycle as a condition of making a female pregnant; continuous receptivity rewarded males for staying around; synchrony prevented any dominant males from monopolising fertile consortships. If