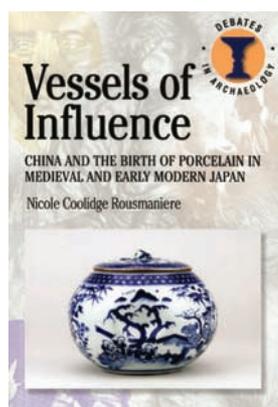


The Idea of Order
Richard Bradley
 Oxford University Press, £60.00
 ISBN 978-0199608096

Why did circular houses dominate so much of Europe's prehistoric landscape? And why, once they were eclipsed by the evolution of rectangular domestic buildings, did the circular archetype remain popular for ritual and ceremonial sites? Richard

Bradley, Professor of Archaeology at Reading, begins in Britain and Ireland, visiting passage graves, Orcadian chambered tombs, and the famous megalithic monuments of Salisbury Plain. The book then opens out onto the Mediterranean and Baltic worlds to see the rise of rectangular architecture.

Was there some human motivation behind the different architectural forms? The author wonders whether round, post-built structures were easy to throw up and quick to dismantle for nomadic communities; but once more permanent settlements were established, it was easier to expand rectangular buildings. A section using prehistoric art to reconstruct how some of these structures – many of which survive only as postholes – is particularly thought-provoking. With generous references provided for those who wish to pursue particular points further, this is an authoritative and absorbing account. *CH*



Vessels of Influence: China and the birth of porcelain in Medieval and Early Modern Japan
Nicole Coolidge Rousmaniere
 Bristol Classical Press, £12.99
 ISBN 978-0715634639

The relationship between China and Japan over the past 1,000 years is a fascinating one. Until about 1600, China was well ahead, and the Japanese admired all things Chinese. Then, with the Edo Revolution in 1615, a more assertive warrior society took control, and the Japanese began to see themselves as equal, if not superior, to the Chinese.

It is only now, in the 21st century, that China has put its skates on once again.

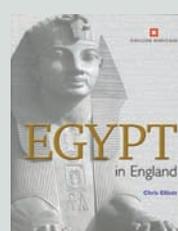
All this is reflected in the history of porcelain. Between 1580 and 1650, Chinese porcelain was acquired in unprecedented quantities in Japan. Then, in the 1600s, Japanese porcelain began to be produced, and was increasingly successful – often signed with 'made in China' marks, which confuses modern collectors probably more than it did the original buyers. The 1630s, with the collapse of the Ming Dynasty, were a time of chaos in China, and Chinese wares began to dry up. At the same time, in 1637 the Porcelain Decrees banned non-professionals, giving a single clan the monopoly in porcelain production. The industry, begun by farmers during the off-season for farming, now belonged to skilled, full-time potters only, and Hizen porcelain swept the field. The author draws on studies of the Japanese 'tea ceremony' as well as the less elegant – though often more encompassing – world of archaeology. And behind it all is the fascinating story of the rise of Japan in the second half of the 2nd millennium AD. *AS*



Earthquake
Andrew Robinson
 Reaktion Books, £14.95
 ISBN 978-1780230276

The Indian Ocean earthquake and Boxing Day 2004 tsunami, the 2010 earthquake on

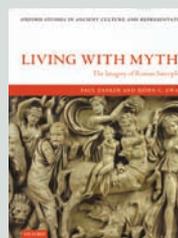
Haiti, and Japan's 2011 earthquake and tsunami are recent reminders of Nature's destructive force. In this immensely readable book, packed with scientific and literary detail, Andrew Robinson looks at the historical and archaeological records to show that such events have shaped human development and society since earliest times. But evidence of Nature's impact is not confined to cataclysmic events: one example cited by the author is the Colosseum in Rome, whose southern half collapsed because it sits on the alluvial bed of a former tributary of the River Tiber, while the northern half, standing on the stable riverbank, survives. *CMc*



Egypt in England
Chris Elliott
 English Heritage, £25.00
 ISBN 978-1848020887

Although not as widespread as other imported styles such as Gothic and Classical, the art

of Ancient Egypt has had a lasting influence on English architecture, often appearing in the most unexpected places – as this beautifully illustrated new book reveals. The first half comprises seven short essays providing a wealth of information on Ancient Egyptian culture, its 'rediscovery' by the West, and how it can still be seen decorating English sites from cemeteries to cinemas – many of which are catalogued in the second part. Take this book and go exploring. *CH*



Living with Myths
Paul Zanker and Björn C Ewald
 Oxford University Press, £150.00
 ISBN 978-0199228690

Similar mythological motifs were used to decorate

both Roman homes and their tombs, but these were more than picturesque ornamentation, revealing their commissioners' concerns and aspirations. This generously illustrated book explores allegorical uses of myths to praise the deceased, as well as representations of mourning. Depictions of Persephone or Ganymede being taken by the gods were frequent, perhaps used to soften the blow of an unexpected loss. However, the funeral ceremony itself rarely appears, except on the coffins of (usually male) children. With summaries of key myths and a useful list of the featured sarcophagi's locations, this is a lovely book to pore over. *CH*