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Reviewed Article:

The Experiment and the Umbrella - 10 Years of Experimental Archaeology

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When reading articles about experimental archaeology written within the last 10 years or so, I find that they often take their point of departure in a brief explanation of the history of the experiment; the birth of the experiment within the positivistic research tradition in the processual archaeology of the 1960s and 1970s, and subsequently, the development and discussions during the postprocessual archaeology of the 1980s. Thereafter, they continue with the matter at hand. This made me wonder about what the main discussions of the late

1990s and the first decade of the new millennium have been. We might not be able to name and define this period more specifically as yet, but it is possible to distinguish overall themes. There seems to be two main discussions: one is of the term experimental archaeology as an overall title covering several activities, and the other, a discussion of the definition of the experiment by categories and terminology.

> The discussions of experimental archaeology as both a method and a title for several activities did not result in a separation of terms.

Who are the contributors?

First of all it is interesting to see who the participants in the discussion of the archaeological experiment are. Certainly, the articles I have selected and read are only representative of a fraction of the contributions, but it is clear that it is primarily those who work with experimental archaeology in their research. Participants from outside this group are rare. This is regrettable as the archaeological experiment is an important method in archaeological research in general.

The discussion of experimental archaeology becoming an overall term was initiated and primarily discussed by archaeologists working at open-air research centres. Here they interact daily with the public and thus reflect on experimental archaeology as an overall term and method in this context. Yet other contributors do not touch upon the issues relating to the public. They rather focus exclusively on the experiment as a scientific method in research and its implications.

Experimental archaeology and the discussion of the umbrella

The discussion of the concept of experimental archaeology as an umbrella title for several different activities has been approached in various ways. Peter Kelterborn wrote an article on the subject in 2001, and gives the example of the Arbeitsgruppe für experimentelle Archäologie in der Schweiz (AEAS-GAES) founded in 1998 and describes their approach. They encourage the inclusion of other activities alongside the scientific archaeological experiment. Their definition of experimental archaeology is wide and includes: experience, to teach and learn, demonstration, replicating and reconstructing, scientific experimentation, documenting and publishing (Kelterborn 2001:21). Peter J. Reynolds expressed concern over this development and argued strongly for the need to disassociate experimental archaeology from anything but the scientific experiment itself. He was worried about the negative effect and pressure it might otherwise entail upon the perception and standard of the scientific experiment (Reynolds 1999). This concern is also shared by others. On the other hand, the positive aspects are also recognized and valued as activities as those mentioned above, attract and maintain public interest in the field of archaeology. The solutions proposed are always to be clear about the specific character of each event, and to be aware that the separation of terms lies with the scientist when working with archaeological problems

(Leuzinger 2001:90; Rasmussen 2001:8f; Outram 2008:4).

To conclude I refer to Eva Andersson Strand who writes;" Today, experimental archaeology is understood as a very wide term and may be seen as an umbrella under which several activities are undertaken" (Andersson Strand 2009). This view seems to be widely accepted today and the discussion now is how we are to manage this situation.

Defining the archaeological experiment

As mentioned earlier, the issue of defining the archaeological experiment has been a continuous one. However, I would not define it as a discussion with different solutions and arguments put forward with the aim of reaching common ground. It is more a presentation of different ways of working with archaeological material and experiments, defined according to different fields of research. Categories of experiments are presented and concepts are developed and defined within a specific framework. This is not to say, that it cannot be applied to and used in experimental archaeology in general, but it does not come across as the tenet. To give an example, Marianne Rasmussen defines three types of experiments: technological, short term experiments; process- oriented, long term experiments and experiments that consider taphonomic questions. These are the categories that work best at classifying the types of experiments carried out at the Land of Legends Lejre[1] , Denmark. However, that does not mean that these categories necessarily apply everywhere. As Marianne Rasmussen states: "Experiments may be categorised in many ways, based on their character and the character of their performance" (Rasmussen 2001:5f). Another example is that of Eva Andersson Strand. She points out three activities which she considers the most important under the umbrella of experimental archaeology: ethnographic studies; experience archaeology and experimental archaeology. Her article is related exclusively to archaeological research and does not deal with the issue of archaeological experiments and their relation to the public, which has been very much the focus of other articles. Her attention is directed at textile research and Andersson Strand introduces the concept 'experimental textile archaeology'. It is in relation to this field of research that the activities are presented, although she points out their relevance to archaeological research in general (Andersson Strand 2009).

Different categories of archaeological material and fields of research may very well require their own approach and are as a consequence defined accordingly.

Terminology

What appears to be agreed upon is that there are two different approaches to the experiment in archaeology: the controlled experiment and the contextual experiment. These are the terms used by Marianne Rasmussen, whereas Alan K. Outram defines them as the laboratory experiment and the 'actualistic' experiment (Rasmussen 2001:6ff, 2007b:16, Outram 2008:2f). The terminology used reflects two sides of the same story as the execution

of the controlled experiment and the laboratory experiment seeks to control as many variables as possible. The same applies to the contextual experiment which Outram calls the 'actualistic' experiment. The experiment does not try to control as many variables and its purpose is to be an eye-opener. This means that it can be conducted in a more 'actualistic' setting, an example given by Marianne Rasmussen is the experiment on the construction of Bronze Age turf barrows at Land of Legends Lejre (Rasmussen 2001:6ff). Although there is a difference in the terms used for these approaches, they still have the same overall meaning. This can be confusing, but I do not find that it is necessary to agree upon and use the same terminology as long as in each case, what the term entails is explained. The problem arises when this is omitted.

The subject of experimental archaeology cannot be discussed without touching upon the subject of reconstruction. It is closely linked to the experiment as it is often an integral part of the execution.

I find that the terminology and definitions in relation to the topic of reconstruction are very specific to certain fields of research and experimental approaches but also to the personal understanding of the term. Marianne Rasmussen writes that reconstruction can be used as an overall term for the process and the product in archaeological experiment in a broad sense but in specific cases it can be inappropriate to use. She presents a terminology where the term 'model' is used about a construction of a house based on the interpretation of an archaeological structure (Rasmussen 2007a:8). Peter J. Reynolds preferred the word 'construct' about the same concept. A reconstruction was, in his understanding, an object or structure where there was sufficient material preserved to make a replica (Reynolds 1999:158f). The examples I have given here are related to experiments with structures and houses. I could give more from other fields of research, but the point I think is clear. As it is the case with the two above mentioned approaches to experimentation, the important factor is to be aware that, although the terminology differs, the meaning might very well be the same. And vice versa, different people may attribute different significance to the same term.

Conclusion

The discussions of experimental archaeology as both a method and a title for several activities did not result in a separation of terms. Today, experimental archaeology is widely accepted as an overall title. Discussions within the field often take their outset in relation to specific activities relevant to different fields of research. Each may emphasize those activities relevant to their archaeological questions and problems. This results in the development and use of different terminologies. However, this does not necessarily cause problems as long as the concepts are adequately defined and their meanings explained.

The discussion of the archaeological experiment as a scientific method continues. As

Marianne Rasmussen indicates, it is necessary to continue this discussion in order to move forward and maintain the standard of the scientific experiment (Rasmussen 2001:8, 2007b:14).

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1 The Historical-Archaeological Centre in Lejre changed its name to Land of Legends Lejre on the 1st of March 2009.

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