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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Event Review: “Living in the Neolithic” – Impressions from the Experimental Archaeology Days of the University of Hamburg in Albersdorf in Summer 2014

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During the summer of 2014 more than 30 students from the Archaeological Institute of the University of Hamburg and four children participated in the practical archaeology week at the Stone Age Village in the Stone Age Park in Albersdorf. In preparation for this week in 2014 –

which was the 10th anniversary of this seminar - the students attended a seminar at the University of Hamburg held by the lecturers T. Friedrich and B. Meller.

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Being introduced to the basics of Experimental Archaeology (theory and skills), museum didactics (guided tours and hands-on projects) and archaeological background (chronology/period, archaeological cultures and findings), the participants gained an overview of the most relevant aspects of this field. At the beginning of the seminar the students chose one of a set of different task groups, mostly divided by different usable materials, in accordance with their own interest and – in some cases – previous knowledge. The aim of the various groups was to formulate either a museum didactical program and/or an experiment on the given topic. The archaeological contexts, approaches and goals of each group were presented to the other students. Meanwhile, important factors for the lecturers were to provide a framework for students to gain experience in archaeo-techniques and to develop a greater understanding of prehistoric life and materials.

The performances, experiments et cetera. were then realised in the practical archaeological week in Albersdorf, where the students worked during the day at the Stone Age Village or in a school nearby. All of the reconstructed houses as well as the Mesolithic huts were used as sleeping spaces this year. Students stayed some of the evenings at the Stone Age Village to continue their projects, even when official work time was over and the public had left. To be recognisable for the visitors and for various other reasons all participants in the practical week – students and teachers alike – were dressed in linen, woollen or leather clothing. The patterns were inspired by and transferred from Neolithic and Bronze Age idols/figurines/illustrations and burial finds from a central European context. Due to the results from previous experimental work more leather clothes and coloured textiles could be seen on the participants during the practical archaeological week.

As in the years before many visitors from the surrounding area, but also from further away, visited the Stone Age Village during the practical week and participated in the students' work. Because of the higher frequency of visitors on Saturdays and Sundays, the students' stay included a complete weekend. During the week participants informed the public about the OpenArch-project as well as communicating their experiences in their respective groups. This was achieved either by answering the questions of passers-by or through guided tours which were held by students on a rotational basis.

Every year the week has a special "theme". In 2014 the topic was "Daily Life and Feasts", but not every group was able to transfer this into their projects. For example, some of the

students mainly repaired broken objects (the clay oven) or were conserving objects (raw hides, bark) for future use. In addition, archaeological evidence and confirmation was and is essential for all groups and topics, which is sometimes a limitation for the realisation of ideas. By combining findings from different geographical and "cultural" regions, good results could nonetheless be achieved. The idea of "feasting" was taken up in experiments surrounding music objects, the ongoing brewing experiment and the joint work of building a sweat lodge, which thankfully was finished by the last day. The first use and some finishing work were carried out by the museum's staff – but it is planned to return with the students to have a first practical test.

Altogether the students again formed groups centred on the different raw materials available in Neolithic times:

1. Stone/Flint. The students were already introduced to the skill necessary to perform flint knapping in the years before, so they produced not only flakes, scrapers and drills - which were used by the other groups to perform their tasks - but focused on the various ways of manufacturing axes and looked at the hafting of tools.
2. Bone/Antler and jewellery. This group focused on learning basic skills as well. After a first practical introduction, small objects (mostly jewellery and needles) were produced. Drilling holes or making holes and investigating the shapes of the holes was one of the goals of the group, who were also in charge of decorating clothing based on archaeological evidence and investigating its use, while wearing it on a daily basis. While sometimes good looking, clothing was not always usable during hard work, as we had presumed. So some of the clothing/decoration in archaeological contexts would have been "a dress for special occasions".
3. Clay/Pottery. This group could be further divided into two "themes". On the one hand, the manufacturing of vessels for the later daily use within the village was important. For that reason pottery made by students during the seminar as well as in the practical week was fired in several sessions ("Feldbrand"). On the other hand, the theme of the week was integrated by producing special pottery, which archaeologists associate with burial rites, especially with "drink offerings" ("Trinkopfer") or feasting at the burial site. Also, one of the participants experimented with the application of decoration. The "potters" were the first to be visited by the audience – so they also acted as introduction-guides to "Neolithic Life".
4. Wood, bark and bast. Two ongoing projects focused on this material this year. As in the years before, containers, buckets and boxes as well as vessels were produced using different materials in their various forms. The other project looked at the chaîne opératoire of vessels made of burr, known from various Neolithic sites in the Alpine region.

5. **Textile**. This is another group of students which can be divided by the use of various materials, though those were sometimes combined. One student group concentrated on dying textiles (linen and wool) by using different colouring plants which were collected in the surrounding area. The other group focused on the weaving loom – varying the fibres, threads and material.
6. **Food**. As important as every year, this group prepared lunch for everyone. Only seasonal and archaeologically verified food was used. Nonetheless every day different dishes could be presented. Cooking, barbecuing et cetera. was carried out on an open fire, but due to the group size the main pot used was a metal one (in the years before, reconstructed ceramic pots like Funnel Beaker Culture pottery were used, but did not survive routine use or the cold winters in the house).
7. **Brewery**. An experiment following the process of brewing beer was attempted. Based on the archaeological record, different techniques for manufacturing (more or less drinkable) beer could be tested. Also various plants and herbs for variation in taste were tried, provided that they would be available in the Neolithic (for example were detected in pollen profiles). Members of the group were free to try and leave their taste impressions for research. The pottery and brewing groups also worked together to try and find pottery useful for the different processes of brewing.
8. **Music**. This group tried to manufacture all kinds of music instruments known from Stone Age times using different materials. The flutes, drums and various kinds of percussion instruments were tested in their use and sound. Flutes were produced specially to look at the mouthpiece and its usefulness while playing.
9. **Sweat Lodge**. On the basis of ethnographical and archaeological evidence the building of a sweating hut (as a form of an early sauna) was attempted. The research and gathering of materials lay in the hands of one student; the actual building took place as a joint task of all participants in their spare time… Actually, apart frombirch bark, all building materials such as stones, hazel root or earth, were gathered in the area surrounding the village. The construction was more or less finished by the end of the 7 days; remaining work and the first trial run were carried out by the museum staff.
10. **Oven re-reconstruction**. The oven reconstruction outside, already built twice before, had to be repaired again due to missing protective outer layer. Because the remaining parts of the oven were in such bad shape, a new one was built next to the old one, but reusing the old materials.
11. **Leather**. Two deer hides were scraped using different tools for example stone tools as known from the archaeological record, but also bone scrapers used by the indigenous inhabitants of North America. The remains of this procedure might also be represented in the archaeological record, but are perhaps not recognised due to their inconspicuous nature (it looks like waste). The hides were then preserved in salt to (re-)use them next year in the ongoing tanning experiments.

12. **Boat**. The group returned after a two-year hiatus and tried new construction techniques and the use of fire/smoke for conserving the leather skin/outside of the boat. The sequence of construction improved markedly, the boat was navigable right after it was finished.

In conclusion, the group – the students, “women in charge” and the museum staff – had great experiences and considerable achievements during the practical week. The continually sunny and hot weather added to that sentiment. As was the case in the earlier years, some projects will be continued according to chance and necessity. The seminar and practical week will take place in the summer term 2015 as well.

Extra information:

Date: 23. July 2014 to 30. July 2014
Organized by: Archaeological-Ecological Centre Albersdorf (AÖZA) and University of Hamburg, Archaeological Department
Responsible: Tosca Friedrich M. A. / Birte Meller M. A. / Dr. Rüdiger Kelm
Number of Participants: >30 students, 4 children, 3 teachers and many visitors

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FIG 1. A SKIN BOAT

FIG 2. FIBRES WORKSHOP

FIG 3. ACTION IN THE STONE AGE VILLAGE

FIG 4. CONSTRUCTION OF A FISH TRAP

FIG 5. WOODWORKING WITH FLINT

FIG 6. BURNING POTTERY

FIG 7. SPINNING WOOL

FIG 8. BACK TATTOO

FIG 9. WEAVING LOOM