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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Book Review: Proceedings of the 25th Meeting of Archaeologists from Germany, the Czech Republic and Austria

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On the 17th – 20th June 2015 40 participants of the 25th Archaeological working group East Bavaria/ West and south Bohemia/ Upper Austria, were hosted by the Upper Palatinate town Bärnau which lies on the border with the Czech Republic. The meeting took place in the

conference hall of the Historic Park Bärnau-Tachov, a remarkable archaeological open-air museum which demonstrates architecture from the 9th to 13th centuries and the ways of life in this period.



The problems of the relation between science and the public is gaining on importance. This leads us to the conclusion that fulfilling the term ‘public archaeology’ helps to not only break down contentions between the two groups, but also shows promise for the future development of our field. The more that members of the public understand our efforts, the more defenders of our work we gain.

The overarching topic of the 25th meeting of the working group was “Built Past – Archaeological reconstruction between science and experience”. That subtitle is pointing out that the connection between science and the experiencing of its results is worth a short commentary. In what other way could we present scientific research than in the form of reconstructions of buildings, technologies and activities of ancient times and enable communication not only among specialist but also among the public. Science then becomes a real experience, a source of learning, and artificial barriers between scientists and early history enthusiasts disappear.

A compilation of 20 contributions was a valuable outcome of the meeting. Let’s pay a brief attention to the single titles with one common denominator – archaeological reconstruction and their presentation to both specialist and layman audiences.

S. Codreanu-Windauer and G. Rasshofer offered an overview of the settlement of the eastern part of the Tirschenreuth region from late Palaeolithic to Modern Times. Late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic stone industry finds are fairly

common. Evidence of Neolithic settlement is rarer as the environment was not suitable for agriculture. The situation changed considerably in the Middle Ages, especially thanks to long distance communications, including the ‘Golden Route’ connecting Nuremberg with Prague.

R. Paardekooper in his contributions explained the nature of archaeological open-air museums in comparison to traditional museums and other methods of archaeological presentation in public spaces. He drew attention to the history of open-air museums, their quality, and practical experience with their management. As he worked, for example, in the open-air museum in Eindhoven (Netherlands) and in one of the oldest open-air museums in Germany, Oerlinghausen, he is well placed for such a summarisation.

Ch. Flügel prepared a critical contribution dealing with often incorrectly applied terminology used in the presentation of archaeological reconstructions. According to the author it is sometimes due to the lack of adhering to guidelines on scientific documentation and the trustworthy presentation of reconstructions. Tourist and economic aspects tend to prevail but Ch. Flügel does not question their importance. He mostly highlights cases where historical

parks are placed together with archaeological ones. At the conclusion of his contribution he names Historical Park Bärnau-Tachov as an example of a competent centre.

The collective of Czech authors B. Dragoun, V. Horák, O. Chvojka and M. Metlička offer in their contribution an overview of archaeoparks in the Czech Republic. They introduce 17 sites with brief characteristics of activities and relevant literature. In comparison to other European countries, in the Czech Republic there is prevalence of parks dedicated to the Middle Ages. The author of this review would like to point out that archaeopark Praha-Troja listed in the overview will unfortunately cease to exist. The palisade and the entrance gate are badly damaged and the last event (a presentation of prehistoric and medieval technologies) took place nearly five years ago when the National Museum in Prague ran the NAKI (Applied Research and Development of National and Cultural Identity Programme) project.

W. Klimesch presented three projects from the last twenty years from Upper Austrian region of Innviertel. The presentation touched upon the reconstruction of a castle tower in Ratzlbург, the excavation and reconstruction of a castle well in Schärding and a baptismal font in Eberschwang. In relation to reconstructions of this type, the author highlights the necessity for a long-term plan for the permanent maintenance of sites being the most important thing to have in place following the reconstruction.

L. Husty introduced the fate of the reconstruction of a longhouse from the LBK culture, which was excavated on the Neolithic settlement of Straubing-Lerchenheid in 1980. The reconstruction was built nine years later, using as many preserved original elements as possible. This house burnt down after four years and a new one was built in 1998 not far from the location of the original remains. The author described the individual phases of the building, though the accompanying photographs showed that some of the original construction methods were not followed. In particular, the lower parts of posts were treated with tar coating instead of the more likely method of protection against damp charring the posts in a bonfire.

Another collective of Czech authors - J. Beneš, M. Pták, P. Růžička, M. Divišová, J. Bumerl, H. Hojerová, M. Konrádová and V. Roubová - presented the gradual building of Archaeopark Netolice. The archaeopark is being developed at the location of a deserted medieval hill fort at Na Jánu. The authors introduced the results of archaeological excavations carried out partially due to the construction of the archaeopark. So far, using period tools and technologies, a tower and walls have been built. The authors presented their future plans and work on the sustainability of the project. Guided tours for public also take place within the area of the proposed Archaeopark Netolice. As in other examples, finances play a major role: finances were also one of the main reasons why the previously mentioned Archaeopark Praha-Troja project was not fully realised.

W.F.A. Lobisser and J. Leskovar presented their intention to build a large wooden house from the Hallstatt period in the archaeological open-air museum of Keltendorf Mitterkirchen in Upper Austria. The article mentions the date for construction as 2016 to 2017. There is some information available from the initial phases of house building session in 2016 and the authors note which basic materials were available to people in the Iron Age. They also considered which tools would have been used to build a wooden house in the given period. While the author of this review hasn't found any more information about the current situation of the project, it is possible that visitors to the Keltendorf Mitterkirchen open-air museum already appreciate the new building.

S. Wolters dedicated his contribution to the Historical park Bärnau-Tachov where he works as a manager. Since the park was founded in 2010 it has become, with 30 reconstructions of wooden buildings, the second biggest of its kind in Germany, maybe even in Europe. S. Wolters reminds us that the high-quality reconstructions of wooden architecture, covering eras from the 8th to 13th centuries were built with help of many volunteers using period tools and methods. The park is dominated by a majestic motte. It is enlivened by many public events and it offers representation of the lives of medieval people in an authentic environment. Despite the unfavourable placement of the border town Bärnau the park boasts quite high visitor numbers.

Again Czech authors with a collective contribution. M. Chytráček, O. Chvojka, J. John, M. Metlička and J. Michálek, contributed with their experiences with the presentation of excavated burial mounds in South and West Bohemia. At first the burial constructions uncovered by excavations were left in situ without any substantial treatment. With the development of presentation methods, it was possible to prepare attractive 3D models of chosen burial features. This article attracts attention to specific sites, for example the exhibit in the centre of the town of Písek, where a grave from the Middle Bronze Age in Bakalář street was, after excavation, left in situ and sensitively covered by a glass lid. This way the archaeological monument is offered to the public in its original shape without the necessity to visit a museum; archaeological sites of this type represented in museums often lose their attractiveness.

A leading Czech researcher into prehistoric architecture, Z. Bláhová Sklenářová, prepared an article on the archaeological evidence of remains of prehistoric buildings. This mostly concerned residential houses. Preserved building elements are invaluable to reconstructions of this type. The author presents basic known construction principals and methods of realisation of single house elements. She lists three sources of information: primary, secondary and tertiary, with their basic characteristics.

J. Unger, L. Jiráň and P. Vavrečka discuss in their contribution possibilities for the reconstruction of archaeological features. They also point out the importance of the fast

development of information technologies, which strongly permeates archaeology. Here they especially appreciate the possibilities of utilising 3D scanning and 3D modelling for presentations of archaeological objects. Using these technologies virtual museums and archaeological monuments are available to the wider public with a high quality of information and without the danger of damage. The author presents two examples of virtual museums founded using a project of the Archaeological Institute of the Czech Academy of Science in Prague. They concern two Neolithic sites: Bylany near Kutná Hora and Praha-Vinoř.

P.Vařeka and P. Netolický dedicated their contribution to a reconstruction of a three-part late medieval village house from Praha-Liboc. It is the first reconstruction of a house from this period in the Czech Republic. In this case we can talk about the realisation of a true experiment: the authors present the documented method of daubing the walls and ceiling. They pay attention to the material used for daubing, its usage, time consumption et cetera. They also took samples of clay to attempt to gain comparative material to help to analyse daub from archaeological evidence of this type of houses. The second part of the experiment was the testing of theories on how smoke from the internal fireplace left buildings. A smoke hole placed in the upper part of the gable wall was shown to work as presumed meaning the smoke collecting under the high ceiling exited the building through this hole.

J. Zuber introduced the Altmühl archaeological archaeopark near Kelheim which was opened in 2008 after two years of construction. The aim of the construction was to remind the public of the archaeological heritage uncovered during excavations preceding the building of the Mohan-Danube canal. Evidence of settlement from the Bronze Age through the Hallstatt period up to the Middle Ages destroyed by the construction of the canal were placed within the network of cycle paths leading through the valley of the Altmühl river. Although they could not prepare accurate reconstruction, visitors can see various constructions and abstract visualisations. In these cases, the creators of the archaeopark face the task of maintaining the exhibits and protecting them from vandalism.

C.S. Sommer's contribution pursues the possibilities of 'enlivening' buildings and constructions, uncovered both through destructive and non-destructive survey, for the public. Medieval or Classical features are more suitable for reconstruction as usually a larger part of original building is preserved. However, even in these cases some elements and details of constructions are replaced by fictional elements, models or looser reconstruction. This can lead to misrepresentation of the original look of the feature. The author introduces some structures created as a part of the reconstruction of the Roman Limit.

J. Štauberová dedicated her contribution to one of the first open-air museum in Bohemia, Březno near Louny. After excavations of a site in Northwest Bohemia the manager of the excavations, Dr Ivana Pleinerová, decided to build in the authentic place an archaeological open-air museum which would introduce to the public the lives of our prehistoric and

medieval ancestors. Gradually reconstructions of a partially sunken house from the early Middle Ages, a Slavic house, a Germanic house and a Neolithic long house were created. A prehistoric method for the storage of agricultural produce was represented through the reconstruction of a storage pit directly within the excavated feature. From the beginning I. Pleinerová attempted to use authentic materials, tools and technologies for the reconstruction. An experiment was dedicated to the exploration of life within the buildings and their heating.

O. Chvojka, P. Menšík and R. Trnka presented a topic different to the ones presented above: the reconstruction of a Bronze Age weaving loom. This task was made difficult by the lack of physical evidence for such a device from that period. Usually the only surviving parts of a loom are the weights of the vertical warp, or channel like features from the Urnfield culture period in South and West Bohemia, South Germany and Austria. These features are interpreted as manipulation pits, within which people operating the weaving looms moved whilst working. In 2011, at the small archaeopark in the Pilsen Zoo, a reconstruction of a loom which built which was partially based on later iconographic sources. They succeeded in suggesting a relation between the channels and the placement of the loom because weights placed in the channels made weaving on the loom easier.

M. Beránek prepared a commentary to his poster, which represented an attempt to create a physical reconstruction of a house in the deserted village of Hol (cadastre Újezd nad Lesy). The use of this reconstruction in the Ztracené adresy television programme by Česká televize helped to promote archaeology.

J. Hložek, R. Kocanda, P. Menšík, M. Procházka and E. Votrubová introduced another reconstruction of a medieval building from the grounds of the castle Pořešín in the Český Krumlov region. This attempt is rather devalued by the fact that there were no remains of such a building discovered within the grounds. The authors defend their reconstructions by claiming that their existence is justifiable and that they will contribute to the presentation of life within the castle grounds in a wider context. If the reconstructions are accompanied with such an explanation, then it is a correct move. If the above information is concealed, then the reconstructions are misleading.

The last contribution was prepared by R. Sandler. She asks if reconstructions fulfil expectations invested in them by archaeology. Is it science or just an activity? The author expresses the concern that reconstructions answer to external pressures rather than to science, which results in conforming to the needs of the public while compromising on science. As archaeologists we should not allow this! Let's build archaeological open-air museums and prepare programmes for the public but always adhering to a scientific approach, authenticity and let's not allow imagination and fiction to win!

The attached bibliographical index of all previous proceedings from the Archaeological working group meetings is very useful.

The problems of the relation between science and the public is gaining on importance. This leads us to the conclusion that fulfilling the term 'public archaeology' helps to not only break down contentions between the two groups, but also shows promise for the future development of our field. The more that members of the public understand our efforts, the more defenders of our work we gain. Maybe it would be advantageous for all experimenters and experientialists to meet as often as possible and share their experience with each other within archaeology, and also to present these experiences with the public as soon as possible. I believe that this would be beneficial for everybody.


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