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## Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

# From the Minutes of “Universities & Experimental Archaeology” Roundtable Discussion 7th May 2014

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EXARC, Experimenta and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid invited several universities to a round table meeting in Madrid, in May 2014. EXARC's aim was to bring colleagues into one room to share their experiences in handling experimental archaeology from an academic perspective.



We know of many universities worldwide at which experimental archaeology is part of the curriculum. At these institutions not only do students receive an introduction to the benefits of experimental archaeology, many also follow up with an MA, PhD or postdoc in this field.

EXARC is the International ICOM Affiliated organisation for experimental archaeology. We also work with archaeological open-air museums, ancient technology and interpretation. With 225+ members in 30+ countries, we include open-air museums, museum professionals, universities and students. One of EXARC's aims is to foster and support experimental archaeology research and initiatives.

For instance, we are running an online and hard copy journal, we manage an online bibliography with 11,000 titles on experimental archaeology and similar subjects (<http://experimentalarchaeology.net>) and, through our social media, assist people in taking their first steps into experimental archaeology. Another important aspect of EXARC's work is to promote dialogue through organizing and helping to organize conferences on experimental archaeology. Often the proceedings of these conferences are published by EXARC to reach a broader audience. EXARC is also planning to publish relevant monographs about experimental archaeology

and related fields.

We know of many universities worldwide at which experimental archaeology is part of the curriculum. At these institutions not only do students receive an introduction to the benefits of experimental archaeology, many also follow up with an MA, PhD or postdoc in this field. Now, more than ever, experimental archaeology has become an accepted tool to better understand our archaeological record. There are, however, other institutes/countries where Experimental Archaeology only plays a minor role.

**To further these efforts, EXARC, Experimenta and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid invited several universities to a round table meeting in Madrid, in May 2014.** EXARC's aim was to bring colleagues into one room to share their experiences in handling experimental archaeology from an academic perspective. This round table discussion focused on the why and how (and how not) of experimental archaeology in a higher education setting. EXARC's objective was to create an informal network of those colleagues who would like to improve experimental archaeology at colleges and universities. We dream about a strong international university network for exchanging ideas and knowledge between students, staff and many more.

## Participants

- **Bill Schindler** has been teaching Experimental Archaeology (EA) for 15 years. He combines primitive technology with EA, stone tools and primitive foodways.

- **Claudia Speciale's** professor is an archaeobotanist who works on huts, cereals, storage and archaeometallurgy. There is a growing interest at Università del Salento and staff are eager to learn more.
- **Nicoletta Volante** has been teaching experimental archaeology since 1989 including a great deal about dissemination. There are no labs at Università di Siena but they have a good relationship with the nearby open air museum. Subjects investigated are lithic technology, pottery, archaeometallurgy and ethnoarchaeology. In Italy there is often a major link between experimental archaeology and re-enactment.
- **Luc Eekhout** observes that museums are seen as amateur undertakings with nice activities for children but missing the link to science. Museums are potentially great platforms but lose credit because they haven't yet developed well. Unfortunately they are only funded with education money.
- **Javier Baena** focusses on Prehistory and Archaeology at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid which disseminates through experimental archaeology and research. Many people (postgraduate students) from nearby countries travel to the university in order to use the lab. Madrid publishes a Journal of experimental archaeology ([www.uam.es/otros/baex](http://www.uam.es/otros/baex)); the Spanish experimental archaeology conference has existed for ten years.
- **Aidan O'Sullivan** of University College Dublin explained that they have three PhD students, five MA students and two undergraduate courses with 85 students. Their work focuses on food and cooking and they have a centre for EA. Students work on every aspect of projects from the start to the result including project management, problem solving and much more. University priorities are to investigate potential for research funding, to publish and to set up student placement.
- **Linda Hurcombe** started in experimental archaeology through investigations into stone tools and obsidian, later moved on to perishable material culture and undertook fieldwork at Butser archaeological open-air museum (AOAM). Exeter University has run an experimental archaeology program since 2001 for both museum and PhD careers, runs undergraduate seminars for between 15 and 60 students and an MA course for about 18 people. Exeter experimental archaeology is part of a toolkit of methods; the university has many PhD students, some of whom come from a crafts background. The university seeks more linking between showcase museum, AOAMs and universities. AOAMs offer objects with a context even if that context is compromised.
- **Roeland Paaderkooper** explained that EXARC started with 13 people around a table, a bit like this meeting. "We are a network, not just for open-air museums". AOAMs are places where a great deal of experimental archaeology is done, and they should keep doing what they do, but use better structure. A lot of knowledge would emerge from that. EXARC's goal is to keep in contact with a large group of interested professionals, semi-professionals and hobbyists. EXARC has an infrastructure and people. A journal and

website too, but mainly many people. EXARC supports conferences like the UK experimental archaeology conference to be held in January 2015.

## Hours/Schedules

EA needs material sources and reference collections. Also two-hour sessions are usually too short.

Aidan: We have a full week before the semester and two weeks mid-term.

Linda: it is hard to schedule out of hours, many students would not be able to join in. Anything else is an optional extra. We have many combined honours students (history, art history et cetera). We do professional placements, but AOAMs are often hard to reach by public transport. There is no budget for excursions; universities don't like to expand on what is offered.

Bill: experimental archaeology is so far beyond what students are used to, but it is hard to explain that this is also academic, like the reading they need to do. It is difficult to keep together the hands-on and reading.

Aidan: We could include it into their assessment, setting up the intellectual framework. You need to enthuse them.

## Gender separation

There are often gender issues in experimental archaeology. Guys tend to get together in groups working with stone tools, for example, whereas women work individually on experimentation such as textiles.

Bill: we have the exact opposite problem; females engage more, but I agree that women work more individually.

Linda: gender separation is an issue, but we tell participants so that they are conscious of this.

## Recognition and Visibility

EA often has more problems with being taken seriously by colleagues than by students.

Bill: once the administration gets behind it your colleagues become more appreciative of it.

Aidan: we are very visual, so that helps a lot.

## How to start an experimental archaeology course?



We need a “how to start an experimental archaeology course” guide. Teaching experimental archaeology is not so hard and we can share information about it. A cost-effective way of sharing is through YouTube and streaming classes. Skype could also be used for sharing information.

Linda: Start easily and locally and work from that. Students often want to tackle projects that are too large. If they do something small they are more likely to succeed. Small scale often works best. Don't worry about colleagues and don't aim at a brilliant course in the first year. Let students do refitting of their own flint knapping – experiments are simple but research is so much more.

Bill: ask colleagues. It takes three or more years to set up something that works well. Share raw materials, look at YouTube et cetera. Take advantage of Primitive Technology people and other craftspeople.

Aidan: go with students to a museum and let them make an object – they will look at objects differently after that. Let them document every step in the production process!

## What is Experimental Archaeology?

EA is a very broad term ranging from highly controlled experiments to living history and experience. Archaeology is about material culture and people. experimental archaeology is about material culture. Material culture is what makes us human. EA's trend is to work with periods other than prehistory. experimental archaeology is a powerful method but it is not used everywhere, so it needs to be fully incorporated and not be seen as separate from archaeology.

Many people involved in Living History learn something personally but they do not advance the science as they don't keep a record. Communicating through Living History is very effective; however communication between different factions is insufficient.

## Museums and Labs for Universities

Museums need experimental archaeology to improve in quality. Museums often lose contact and are isolated on their own island. The old Lejre approach (research grants) was fantastic but it may be beyond the ability of individual museums. EXARC had developed plans for the EXARC experimental archaeology award which can easily be included in the approach. It would be good to have student placements at museums in order to carry out experiments, present their findings at conference and publish. Living History festivals could be very interesting and can include EA.

## Peer Reviewed Publications

The fundamental issue is that universities are driven to publish. We should not aim for a peer reviewed section in the EXARC Journal. The EXARC Journal may publish digests of what's previously been published in reference journals. A peer reviewed journal of experimental archaeology is an option. There is the Journal of Ethnoarchaeology and Experimental Archaeology (Leftcoast Press). The journal market is very much in flux.

## Digital Archaeology Repository

Experimental collections are a huge problem, it all gets too much; the documentation, the materials themselves and how to make it accessible. There are talks to share the John Coles and Errett Callahan library.

EXARC has an online structure to share complete archives. Can we expand this? Funding would be needed to improve the structure, the server space, the digitisation of huge amounts of material and the sharing of the archives.

## Formalising our Goals

We need cooperation between universities, not just in Europe, but beyond. We have a strong group present but more people should have attended. Universities will start paying attention the moment money comes into play. Our aim should be to identify three or four options to get funding for exchanges and training. The interests are too diffused. We need seed funding for moving people. We need to go for a bigger agenda and need a hook so outsiders better understand. Hands-on learning is a hook in the US but not necessarily in Europe where they want stellar research.

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