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## Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

# Interview: Pascal Ratier, Coordinator of the European Archaeology Days

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Europe is celebrating Archaeology, everybody is invited! Mr Pascal Ratier, who is in charge of events and colloquia for the French National Institute for Preventive Archaeological Research (INRAP), is the coordinator of the European Archaeology Days. Since his arrival at the INRAP in 2014, he has been organizing the event, at first at a national level and, since 2019, at the European scale. Mr Ratier has a background in political sciences, but has been working in the cultural sector since the very start of his career. Interested in archaeology, he developed a

personal taste for heritage interpretation and science communication through his work at the INRAP.



In this interview he shared with us some facts and memories of the Archaeology Days and their evolution, talked about the prospects of the event, but also of the current health crisis and its repercussions.

*In your own words, what are the EAD?*

The EAD are an opportunity to gather together all the actors working in archaeology, from excavation to museum workers and encourage them to organize events destined for the general public and aimed at attracting a new audience. The aim is to show people what archaeology really is. For many, archaeology is simply 'people who excavate using brushes and small tools'. Through the EAD we want to take a step forward, show people that archaeology is a whole *chaîne opératoire*, a long process, that starts with fieldwork and ends in the museum or the laboratory.

*The EAD were initially the National Archaeology Days, established in France in 2010. The INRAP was behind this initiative, and you have been the general coordinator since 2014. How did this event start off?*

Here's what happened: in 2010 the INRAP started a collaboration with Arte, a European television channel, and the idea was (and still is actually) to have a full day dedicated to archaeology in June, with films and documentaries. Back then my colleagues thought, why not accompany this with on-site special events everywhere in France in collaboration with the different services working in archaeology? That was the original idea, and it was a great success! With 95 organisers participating in the very first edition, we decided it was worth establishing this event on an annual basis.

*Is this collaboration with Arte ongoing?*

It surely is, and Arte is an important collaborator of the EAD. The INRAP has an important production of audiovisual material, with reports on our fieldwork, or documentaries coproduced with Arte or Gedeon Programmes. For example, we have recently made a second documentary on Guédelon, which is a very popular open-air museum in France, and has grown a lot in the past few years with new constructions.

*So, from the very start there was great excitement from the side of your partners. And what was the response of the public to this event? Did you manage to touch a greater audience?*

Since 2010 we see a stable increase of engagement in the event, both in our partners and in our audience. Indeed, in 2010 we had 95 organisers throughout the country, while in 2019 (the last edition before the COVID-19 crisis) we counted more than 600 venues. In 2010 we had 50,000 visitors, while in 2019 we reached 220,000 people. In terms of venues, we don't limit our choice of partners in those who are specifically engaged in archaeology, but we open up to those engaged in heritage in general. Libraries or archives, for example, are not strictly engaged in archaeology, but they can participate and broadcast archaeology through their collections. We observe that our audience increases at the same time as the number of organizers; the more organizers there are, the more people are affected, the more this event becomes popular, the more people come visit.

*Do you believe that it is possible to touch all kinds of audiences through the EAD?*

We want to lead people to archaeology, but we need to place this ambition in a socio-cultural context. In France, the Ministry of Culture has been conducting surveys since 1974 on the cultural habits of the citizens. According to these, in the past 30 years there has been a boost in the interest that people show for cultural heritage. In 1974 only 40% of French people were habitually engaged in culture, and it was mainly people with a higher educational level. That means that less than 1 in 2 people had visited heritage sites within a year. In 2018 the survey showed that 70% of French citizens had visited a heritage site during the year. This positive change has probably been bolstered by the European Heritage Days. Still, it is the highly educated who tend to express an interest in culture and heritage. And when it comes to archaeology, in 1974 only 10% of those who were engaged in culture had visited an archaeological site (for instance a museum or rock art site), and in 2018 this percentage did not grow much. Not many people in France visit places of archaeological interest, and for those who do it's often during vacation, so usually far from their place of residence. You ask if we can touch all kinds of audiences. That is extremely challenging. We know there is a pool of potential neophytes, within those who already have cultural habits, as well as within those who are less active within culture but can be intrigued by archaeology. My surveys during the Archaeology Days showed that we manage to attract people who rarely visit

archaeological sites, especially when we use the public space as our setting. We intend to create a very accessible and popular event, but that doesn't mean that it will be appealing to everybody. It rather means that it will be inclusive and open, which can make it attractive to the general public and to those who have little contact with archaeology.

*In 2019 the festivities around archaeology and heritage opened up to European scale. How did you have the idea of creating a European event on archaeology?*

In reality we had been asking for a permission to introduce this event to Europe for a while, but we had no answer. Then, just after another year-long event came to an end, the director gave us the green light, so that for the 10th anniversary of the Archaeology Days we could open up to Europe. It was the occasion of the anniversary that created the right setting for this transition.

*And how did Europe respond?*

First of all, we were thrilled with this news. However, by then I was all alone, my colleague had left, I didn't feel I could pull off a Europe-wide event by myself. So I said, let's do it, but let's go easy. Let's open up only to our neighbouring countries for now and see how it goes. Well, the response was very positive. What's more, a couple of months later I started receiving angry emails from around Europe - Poland, Lithuania, Czech Republic - asking how come they didn't have the right to participate! They'd say "Don't you know we are in the European Union?". The information circulated fast, partly thanks to EXARC, who has been a partner since day one. The response was overwhelming, so we decided it was the moment to open the European Archaeology Days to all 47 countries who are members of the Council of Europe. We had 18 countries participating in 2019, and another 10 countries joined in 2020, despite the crisis.

*Were there national Archaeology Days in other European countries before 2019, and did they integrate their events into the EAD celebration?*

Yes, indeed, several countries had their own Archaeology Days. Some adjusted, like the Netherlands or Britain. Others are still reluctant to change their dates, like Sweden that celebrates archaeology in August, or Scotland that celebrates it in October. One thing is for sure: all European countries need to promote their archaeological heritage in a national level, in order to raise awareness and funds. What we suggest is that we, as European members, gather up and celebrate Archaeology together. Because together we are stronger, together we are more visible.

*What is the organizational structure of the EAD within a country and within Europe?*

What we aim to create is an event of the same nature and structure as the European Heritage Days. We, the INRAP, took an initiative, we opened up to Europe, and we remain the overall European coordinators of the EAD, providing all participants with a website and visual materials. Now we encourage the authorities that are in charge of archaeology in the different countries to take over and become national coordinators. This started in 2020, we had 10 coordinators, and many more are about to take over. We suggest that they stir up the archaeological community in their countries, that they advertise the event on a national and a regional level, and that they gradually become independent. And as I said earlier, we insist on adopting the same dates throughout Europe, this is the only way the EAD can have an impact on a larger scale, otherwise they won't make sense.

*In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic changed our daily routine and deprived us of a normal social and cultural life. The EAD had to go virtual. How did you cope with this unforeseen crisis? How did the EAD adapt to this complicated context?*

We had to make adjustments, we reorganized the EAD in one month. Today it's the same, we don't have a crystal ball, we can't predict what is to happen in the following months. But we will be prepared. Last year, the health situation varied from one country to another, some countries had the possibility to host on-site events, like Slovenia, while others, like France, couldn't. The situation was very diverse, so we let the participants choose what they wanted to do - on-site events, virtual events or both.

*What was the response of your European partners and what was the impact of last year's event?*

Well, we had over 1000 events throughout Europe, which, under these circumstances, was quite impressive. We reached 700 organisers in Europe, which may be less than we had predicted, but given the situation it was great. In France, we were barely out of a lockdown, but we didn't want to cancel, and after all it went really well. We were present, we made archaeology visible, and we stand by our choice to maintain the event on the original dates, and not reschedule. We consider that it was a success. In general we had the 2/3 of the events in a digital form, and 1/3 on-site. It depended on the country's restrictions. In France we had a 20% of the events on-site, the rest was digital. According to our statistics, we reached 180,000 visitors on the official website over the weekend of the EAD.

*What are the plans for 2021? What will happen if the context remains unfavourable?*

If only we had a crystal ball... We hope that the situation will be favourable in June and will allow us to get together in person and celebrate archaeology in the places where it actually takes place. After all, in some countries museums are still open today. We still

have a few months ahead of us, by then we should be able to host physical events, so we tend to encourage participants to organize their event on this basis. The idea of digital events is of course valid and remains a possibility. However, this year we will only allow people to organize special virtual events for the occasion. Last year museums had the possibility to share on the official website several digital resources that they had at their disposal, like virtual visits, videos or games. For the 2021 edition we'll ask participants to create online events exclusively for the EAD. It can be a Facebook Live, for example, or a virtual visit of a site. Digital events are probably here to stay. They became the norm during this pandemic, they constitute a new way to experience culture, and I think that we will integrate them to the traditional cultural offer.

*What interest could EAD present for the archaeological open-air museums? Why should they join the other archaeological museums and sites in this celebration?*

It's the same principle as for any other archaeological institution. It's about gaining visibility through the media, becoming popular, attracting new audiences and raising awareness about the protection and conservation of archaeological heritage. And it's also about being united, joining a larger, Europe-wide event, this way we all campaign for the same things at the same moment. What we try to do during the EAD is bring the public in contact with professionals who work in archaeology, facilitate their dialogue, share knowledge about the past and give the public a chance to speak, because they usually have plenty to say. All these things can happen in open-air museums, they are in fact great venues for such an event due to their inherent interactive, hands-on approach.

*Finally, given the unforeseen crisis situation and the repercussions it has had in the cultural sector at the global level, how do you see the present and future of those places and actors working in the promotion of archaeology (museums and open-air museums, monuments, associations, ...)?*

I could only give my personal opinion on this subject, which is the same for all cultural places. Personally, I have difficulties understanding why cultural venues are still closed in so many countries. How come it's that unnecessary to visit a museum, what is the difference between a museum and a supermarket after all? Of course it entails establishing strict rules to ensure optimal sanitary conditions, but that shouldn't keep people from going to museums, cinemas or the theatre. And there are many who agree with this, even doctors. We can't live without these - that'd be the death of a society - so we need to redefine what we call our basic needs, because access to culture is a basic need.

*What good practices could we adopt to survive this crisis? Are the digital technologies the answer?*

The digital technologies of tomorrow won't be the same as those of yesterday, they constantly evolve. Cultural institutions will experiment with these new forms and we'll be using them much more than before. I believe, however, that cultural institutions have also realised that there are limits. A virtual event, such as an online conference, is not the same as a physical one, it involves creating specific forms of engagement with an audience. It is a good thing, though, that so many cultural institutions invest in digital technologies, and what they offer will evolve as well, so they can manage to attract a new audience. That is a rather positive aspect of this crisis. With the hybrid format that we adopted during the EAD last year we discovered that we managed to engage people who had never come to us before, and in large numbers too. But surviving the crisis cannot simply rely on these tools, it will be more complicated than this.

*Thank you for your time and for this interesting overview of the EAD. Personally, it got me all excited for the 2021 edition of the EAD!*

Thank you, we are excited too. Subscriptions are already open, we expect to see plenty of interesting events throughout Europe again this year. And hopefully open-air museums will join us as well, they have so much to give to the EAD!

**The European Archaeology Days are back on the 18, 19 and 20 June 2021.** Registration is open and free. Visit the official website to register your venue and enter your events: <https://journées-archeologie.fr/c-2020/accueil> Check out your country's page and make sure to register under the right country. You can enter your events until the start of the EAD 2021.

**Need more information?** Check out the EXARC page on the EAD:

<https://exarc.net/cooperation/ead> and do not hesitate to contact the EXARC coordinator Ms Ligeri Papagiannaki at [l.papagiannaki@exarc.net](mailto:l.papagiannaki@exarc.net).

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## Gallery Image



FIG 1. EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGY DAYS. FRESCO AND CERAMICS ON THE BARBERINI VINEYARD ©COLOSSEUM ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK (ITALY)



FIG 2. EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGY DAYS. VISIT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPOSITORY OF THE MUSEUM OF NYON, (SWITZERLAND) ©MUSEUM OF NYON



FIG 3. EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGY DAYS. OPEN DAY OF AN EXCAVATION SITE IN NARBONNE, (FRANCE) ©MYR MURATET, INRAP



FIG 4. EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGY DAYS. EXCAVATION SIMULATION WORKSHOP AT THE ZEMĚRÁJ NATURE ADVENTURE