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Reviewed Article:

Which Type of Archaeological Open-Air Museum? A Classification Proposal

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Archaeological Open-Air Museums (AOAMs) are well established in the international museum landscape, and today more than 350 of these sites can be counted in Europe alone. These museums differ considerably from one another, and each of them presents specific and unique features. Their identity strongly depends on several occurrences, such as the period in which they were founded, the stakeholders who conceived them (private, public, entrepreneurs, academics, amateurs, et cetera), and the cultural paradigms on which they

rely. Given the different circumstances that shape them, it is not easy to draw a prototype of an AOAM, and many typologies of sites can easily follow under this name. Starting from these premises, this contribution intends to introduce the first AOAM's classification, based on two main attributes, such as the chronological periods displayed and the location of the AOAM. The article aims to propose a shared terminology to easily describe the AOAMs and refer to their main characteristics with a short and straightforward formula.

> The new classification proposed in this article is intended as a first step in the direction of establishing a more complete set of tools to make the Archaeological Open-Air Museums main characters in the museological discourse.

Introduction

Archaeological Open-Air Museums (AOAMs) are well established in the international museum landscape, and presently more than 350 of these sites can be counted in Europe alone (Venues EXARC, 2023).

These museums immensely differ culturally and regionally, each of them presenting specific and unique features. Their identity strongly depends on several occurrences, like the period in which they were founded, the stakeholders who conceived them (private, public, entrepreneurs, academics, amateurs), and the cultural paradigms on which they rely. Given the different circumstances that shaped them, a prototype of an AOAM cannot be easily drawn, and many typologies of sites can follow under this broad term.

In this contribution, we understand the definition of an Archaeological Open-Air Museum as per the most recent EXARC definition (2008), presented and discussed by R. Paardekooper (Paardekooper, 2014, pp.149-150).

"An archaeological open-air museum is a non-profit permanent institution with outdoor true to scale architectural reconstructions primarily based on archaeological sources. It holds collections of intangible heritage resources and provides an interpretation of how people lived and acted in the past; this is accomplished according to sound scientific methods for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment of its visitors."

Starting from these premises, this article intends to introduce an AOAM classification, aiming to develop a new shared terminology to describe their main characteristics with a short and straightforward formula. No similar attempts have been made so far in this direction, and this proposal can be regarded as a starting point.

This classification is needed as it will facilitate and encourage a larger discussion around Archaeological Open-Air Museums, broadening the debate on their theoretical principles and rooting them more decisively in the museological landscape.

The reader will notice that the majority of the AOAMs mentioned in this work are located in Europe and often portray medieval contexts. It does not intend in any way to reduce or undermine experiences in other parts of the world or focused on other ages. This choice is solely due by the education and the research background of the author who has preferred to mainly discuss sites visited personally. Any inaccuracy in their descriptions should be attributed to the author, who welcomes any suggestions.

The Classification

Two main elements are at the base of this newly proposed AOAM classification: the chronological period displayed and the location.

Concerning the former, two main groups emerge. They are defined as follow:

1. Mono-period AOAM: an Archaeological Open-Air Museum where one specific prehistoric or historic period is displayed.
2. Multi-period AOAM: an Archaeological Open-Air Museum where more than one prehistoric or historic period is displayed.

It is important to clarify that the displayed prehistoric or historic period is conceived only as the period portrayed in the AOAM and not the actual chronological periods of the archaeological site on which the AOAM might be based on. Taking as an example the AOAM of the Terramara di Montale (Modena, Emilia-Romagna, Central Italy), according to this classification it will be considered a Mono-period museum, as it only portrays a Terramare dwelling site (Bronze Age), even though traces of a medieval fortification have been detected on the archaeological area where the museum lays (Area Archeologica, 2023).

The location of the AOAM and its proximity to an archaeological site stands as the second parameter applied. According to the different possible scenarios, the following sites can be identified:

1. On-site AOAM: an Archaeological Open-Air Museum situated within or adjacent to the perimeter of the archaeological site which is portraying. Part of the reconstructed buildings might be even situated on the same very position of the archaeological traces on which the reconstructions are primarily based. The term primarily intends to stress that although many aspects of a reconstruction are based on a specific archaeological structure, hardly any archaeological reconstruction is ever based on only one site or one set of sources.
2. Off-site AOAM: an Archaeological Open-Air Museum not situated within or adjacent to the perimeter of the archaeological site which is portraying (if any specific site is taken as a reference).

3. Hybrid AOAM: an Archaeological Open-Air Museum only partially situated within or adjacent to the perimeter of the archaeological site which is portraying. This is a common scenario when some of the architectural reconstructions are primarily based on the archaeological site on which the AOAM lays, while others are based on data collected from other archaeological contexts. A portion of the museum is On-site, the remaining is Off-site.

It is meaningful to draw the distinction between On-site AOAM and Hybrid AOAM only for the AOAMs where a consistent part of the reconstructions is Off-site, and it is the result of a deliberate cultural/educational strategy of the museum. Indeed, it is common for On-site museums that some of the buildings are not based on archaeological evidence (for example functional or didactic structures like the oven, the animal fence, the kiln, etc). The existence of these buildings does not make a site Hybrid, as they do not represent a consistent and coherent section of the AOAM, but just isolated structures. In the cases in which the distinction might not be so obvious, what matters is the cultural project of the AOAM, as explicitly stated by the educational and scientific literature produced by the museum.

All the parameters presented above can be combined in two main categories, and six sub-categories according to the layout outlined in Table 1, which is the backbone of the AOAMs classification proposed here. The paragraphs below will illustrate each sub-category through several examples of existing AOAMs.

Archaeological Open-Air Museum (AOAM)					
1.Mono-period			2.Multi-period		
a. On-site	b. Off-site	c. Hybrid	a. On-site	b. Off-site	c. Hybrid

TABLE 1. SCHEME OF THE AOAMS CLASSIFICATION.

1a. On-site Mono-period AOAMs:

An example of Mono-period On-site AOAM is the West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village, situated on the right side of the River Lark, (Icklingham, Suffolk, South-West England). The museum rises on an Anglo-Saxon archaeological site detected during the 19th century, formed by the remains of a settlement and a burial area (West, 1969, p.1). Although the latter has been almost entirely destroyed due to the intense agricultural exploitation of the soil, the settlement remnants were sill mainly undisturbed (*Ibidem*). These have been investigated between 1965 and 1972, revealing one of the best-preserved early medieval sites in the UK (West, 1969, p.2). The excavation unearthed 69 *grubenhauser* (or SFB, Sunken-Featured Building) dated between the 6th and the 7th century (Tipper, 2012, p.9). After the excavation was completed in 1973, some SFBs were reconstructed, opening the area to the public as an AOAM (Tipper, 2012, p.11). Between 1973 and 2012 six more SFBs have been reconstructed,

many of them, like the Farmer House (1990), are located on the very same position of the original archaeological traces of the Anglo-Saxon buildings (Tipper, 2012, p.16).

Using the classification outlined above, this AOAM follows under the On-site Mono-period sub-category. Given that:

1. It portrays a specific prehistoric or historic period (Early Middle Ages, specifically the 6th/7th century CE).
2. It is situated within the perimeter of the archaeological site which is portraying (West Stow). Part of the reconstructed buildings are situated on the same very position of the archaeological traces on which the reconstructions are primarily based (the Farmer House).

Other similar sites are the Archeodromo of Poggibonsi (Poggibonsi, Tuscany, Central Italy), located just a few meters away from the perimeter of the archaeological site of Poggio Imperiale (Fronza, 2018, p.75).

On-site Mono-period AOAMs are usually founded in the contiguity of sites featured by the presence of few (or none) visible archaeological traces. For instance, the first two examples mentioned above, date back to the Early Middle Ages, a period in which wood structures were predominant in Europe (Stalley, 1999, p.15). Although wooden buildings can be extremely elaborated, they leave few traces behind, like the post holes lines that allow to interpret the outline of a building. It would be very hard to present these features to a non-specialist public, and the visual support provided by the reconstructions is particularly effective.

Unlike other sub-categories, the valorisation of the archaeological site is often the reason behind the construction of a Mono-period On-site AOAM, which is bound to a specific location.

1b. Off-site Mono-period AOAMs:

The Årsunda Viking village (Sandviken, Gävleborgs län, Sweden) well illustrates the main attributes of a Mono-period Off-site AOAM (See Figure 1). The open-air museum portrays a small Viking settlement, including several houses, a smithy, a cooking house and a longhouse (Årsunda Viking, 2016). Since 1994 the Årsunda Viking village hosts a Viking festival in March (Hannam and Halewood, 2008).

This AOAM is a Mono-period Off-site as:

1. It portrays a specific prehistoric or historic period (the Viking Age).
2. It is not based on a specific archaeological site, and it is not situated within or adjacent to its perimeter.

Mono-period Off-site AOAMs often emerge with the desire to establish a tangible location where the history and the heritage of a region can take shape. They are usually set up by municipalities, local communities, or reenactment groups. For instance, the Årsunda Viking village has been founded by the Sandviken Municipality and is currently run by the non-profit Association Fafner (Årsunda Viking, 2016).

The connection with a specific archaeological site (both in the location and in the inspiration at the base of the reconstructed buildings) is not the main point of these AOAMs. In fact, their focus does not lay on the valorisation of a specific site, but rather on the creation of a reference point for the local community to emphasize a specific moment of the history of the region.

Another similar site is the Middelaldercentret (Sundby, Sjælland, Denmark), where the fictional market town of Sundkøbing has been built. It is not located on an archaeological site, and it aims to show how a medieval market town might have looked like (Sundjoebing, 2023).

1c. Hybrid Mono-period AOAMs:

The third Mono-period sub-category is featured by the Hybrid AOAMs.

The Midgard Viking Centre (Borre, Vestfold Fylke, Southern Norway) represents a good example. Opened in 2013, it displays several buildings such as a great hall, a smithy and two other small structures (Gildehallen, 2023). This AOAM is adjacent to the archaeological site of Borre, an impressive archaeological compound where several burial mounds can still be observed, and the remains of diverse structures have been found over the last decades (Myhre, 2000, p.36).

The most impressive reconstruction at the Midgard Viking Centre is the great hall, a monumental longhouse measuring 63x18 meters (Tonning et al., 2020, p.159). The building has been reconstructed starting from the data gathered during a geomorphological survey conducted between 2007 and 2008 at Borre (Schneidhofer et al., 2022). The survey has shown several postholes aligned, forming the perimeter of a great building, named C building, dated to the 10th century CE. It has been interpreted as a communal meeting point (Tonning et al., 2020, p.148).

On the other end, the reconstruction of the smithy, has been instead based on the evidence from the archaeological site of Viborg (Søndersø, Midtjylland, Denmark) (Orten Lie, 2023) where the excavation conducted between 1981 and 1985 have revealed a Viking and late medieval settlement (Krongaard Kristensen, 1988, p.191).

Therefore, the Midgard Viking Centre can be considered a Hybrid Mono-period AOAM as:

1. It portrays one specific prehistoric or historic period (Viking Age).

2. Some of the reconstructions (the great hall) are situated within or adjacent to the perimeter of the archaeological site which is portraying (the archaeological site of Borre).
3. Other reconstructions (the smithy) are not situated within or adjacent to the perimeter of the archaeological site on which are based on (Viborg Søndersø).

Another interesting example is the Lofotr Viking museum (Leknes, Nordland Fylke, Norway). The site is situated in the proximity of the archaeological site of Borg, excavated between 1986 and 1989, where a massive chieftain longhouse has been discovered (Munch, 2003, p.100; Douglas Price, 2015, p.307).

Starting from 1995, the longhouse has been reconstructed close to the remains of the excavated great hall. Furthermore, the AOAM displays some reconstructed ships, one of them is the full-size replica of the ship of Gokstad and the second one replicates the Oseberg ship (Lofotr Vikingmuseum (NO), 2023) (See Figure 2). The ships have been both discovered in the county of Vestfold og Telemark (respectively in Sandefjord and Tønsberg), situated more than 1500 kilometres South from the archaeological site of Borg. The compresence of reconstructions belonging to the same period (the Viking Age) partly based on the archaeology of Borg and partly on other sites, makes the Lofotr Vikingmuseum a Hybrid Mono-period AOAM.

2a. On-site Multi-period AOAMs:

An example of a Multi-period On-site AOAM is Eketorps Borg (Eketorp, island of Öland, Soth-Eastern Sweden). The museum lays on the archaeological site of Eketorp, excavated between 1964 and 1974, yielding back a circular fortress in use between the 4th century CE and the 13th century CE (Borg et al., 1976). At least three different occupation periods have been identified (Douglas Price, 2015, p.292). The reconstructions started in 1978 and have been displayed on the very same archaeological remains within the circular fortification, with a specific focus on the Iron Age and Middle Ages layers (Josefson and Olofsson, 2006).

As far as the former period is concerned, a residential building inspired by the Iron Age layers has been reconstructed, with walls of limestone and roofs of turf (Historia, 2023). Concerning the latter, several buildings have been inspired by the phase Eketorp III (1170-1240), the most impressive of which is the gate tower, a monumental defensive gate primarily based on archaeological evidence from the site and supplemented by details of contemporary buildings located on the island of Öland, such as the gate tower at Gråborg (Historia, 2023).

This AOAM lies under the On-site Multi-period sub-category as:

1. It is situated on the archaeological site which is portraying.
2. More than one prehistoric or historic period is displayed simultaneously (the Iron Age and the Middle Ages).

3. All the reconstructions are primarily based on evidence gathered during the excavation at the Eketorp archaeological site.

These open-air museums hold a very strong connection with the layout of the archaeological site on which they are laying, but unlike the On-site Mono-period examples, the choice of the portrayed periods is more arbitrary, as a specific age can be omitted to better valorise another one. In fact, the goal of these AOAMs, as all the Multi-period ones, is not to create a coherent reconstruction, but rather an imaginative "time travel" where the visitor can explore the long history of a site or of a region, appreciating the differences between several ages.

Preferably, although this is not always possible, this purpose should be made evident by keeping the different reconstructions apart, in separated chronological sections.

2b. Off-site Multi-period AOAMs:

The Ancient Technology Centre (Wimborne, Dorset, South-West England) well depicts the main characteristics of a Multi-period Off-site AOAM. This open-air museum was born in 1986 as a school experimental archaeology project, and since then many buildings have been reconstructed (Ancient Technology Centre (ATC) (UK), 2023) (See Figure 3). Several different ages are displayed, starting from a Neolithic log cabin, an Iron Age earth house and round house (based respectively on the excavations carried on the Isle of Man and the site of Moel y Gaer in Northern Wales) (The Earth House, 2023; Iron Age Roundhouse, 2023). Furthermore, the Ancient Technology Centre hosts a forge, from evidence gathered in the Roman city of Londinium, a Saxon workshop, inspired by the Sunken Featured Building (SFB or grubenhaus), and a Viking long house, based on the royal garrison forts in Denmark (Roman Forge, 2023; Saxon Workshop, 2023; Viking Longhouse, 2023).

This AOAM can be considered an Off-site Multi-period as:

1. The Ancient Technology Centre is not situated within or adjacent to the perimeter of any of the archaeological sites on which its reconstructions are based on.
2. More than one prehistoric or historic period is displayed (Neolithic, Iron Age, Roman Age, Early Middle Ages, Viking Age).

A great number of AOAMs belong to this sub-category, and they often experience a strong appreciation among the visitors. Given that they are not connected to a specific archaeological site, they can be founded anywhere, but they are usually located in places easily accessible to the public. Furthermore, in these AOAMs any period can be portrayed and there is virtually no limit in the reconstructions that can be set up, both from a geographical and chronological point of view. These sites are in fact a collection of reconstructed buildings, so that they usually provide to the visitors a varied educational offer, amplifying the learning opportunities and appealing the interest of broad audiences. Although the Off-site Multi-

period AOAMs enjoy a great freedom in their design, it is important to stress that the reconstructed buildings must always be based on archaeological data and realised according to the most updated developments in the fields of archaeology and experimental archaeology. When this approach is lacking, the AOAM risks undergoing the process described by the museologists Stone and Planel as "Disneyfication" which turns it into a theme park (Stone and Planel, 1999, p.8; see also Zifferero, 2003, p.50).

A further example of Off-site Multi-period AOAM is the Irish National Heritage Park (Wexford, Wexford County, Ireland) where more than 16 structures have been reconstructed, ranging from the Mesolithic to the late Middle Ages (Irish National Heritage Park (INHP) (IE), 2023).

2c. Hybrid Multi-period AOAMs:

An excellent example of this typology of sites is the Āraišu Ezerpils Arheoloģiskais park (Drabesi, Vidzeme, Latvia) (See Figure 4). The AOAM hosts several reconstructions, based on Stone Age and Bronze Age archaeological excavations from Latvia and North-Eastern Europe (Araisi Ezerpils Archaeological Park (LV), 2023). As these buildings do not raise in proximity of the archaeological sites on which are based, they can be regarded as Off-site reconstructions. On the other hand, the Āraišu Ezerpils archaelogical park also exhibits a Latgallian settlement, dated to the 9th to 10th century, built on a small island located in the Lake Āraiši (Araisi Ezerpils Archaeological Park (LV), 2023). The lake dwelling is based on the archaeological site excavated on the island by the archaeologist J. Apals between 1965 and 1979 (Apals, 1995). The settlement reconstruction partially lays on the excavated site, with a slight shift of 5 to 10 meters, arranged not to disturb the parts of the site which are still unexcavated (around 25% of the total area) (Meinerts, 2023).

This AOAM falls under the Hybrid Multi-period sub-category as:

1. It hosts both On-site (lake-dwelling) and Off-site reconstructions (the Stone Age and Bronze Age buildings).
2. More than one prehistoric or historic period is displayed (Stone Age, Bronze Age, Middle Ages).

Conclusions

The new classification proposed in this article is intended as a first step in the direction of establishing a more complete set of tools to make the Archaeological Open-Air Museums main characters in the museological discourse.

The goal of this contribution is to present a preliminary terminology to describe the layout of any AOAM with a straightforward formula, that will provide more clarity both to the public and the academic community on the choices these museums make and the cultural projects on which they rely.

The classification is composed by the combination of two parameters: location and portrayed period(s). It results in two main categories, Mono-period and Multi-period, and six sub-categories: On-site Mono-period, Off-site Mono-period, Hybrid Mono-period, On-site Multi-period, Off-site Multi-period and Hybrid Multi-period.

Although the classification is meant to simplify the way in which AOAMs can be described, it requires much information to label them effectively and precisely. This information is rarely easily accessible as the data on which the reconstructions are based are often unpublished. The same goes for the archaeology of the soils where these lay. Thus, if the task of classifying a siteis quite challenging for the visitor and the AOAM "outsider", the staff and the volunteers are the most suited stakeholders to present a description of their own site, as they often have access to first hand data and unpublished documentations.

It is our hope that this article will stimulate a broader debate on this topic, which could eventually result in a more complete and inclusive classification, that will consider experiences from AOAMs located all over the world, portraying any prehistoric or historic period.

Keywords archaeological open-air museum

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Gallery Image

FIG 1. OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AT THE ÅRSUNDA VIKING VILLAGE (SANDVIKEN, GÄVLEBORGS IÄN, SWEDEN). SOURCE: COURTESY OF ÅRSUNDA VIKING VILLAGE.

FIG 2. ONE OF THE RECONSTRUCTED SHIPS AT THE LOFOTR VIKINGMUSEUM (LEKNES, NORDLAND FYLKE, NORWAY). SOURCE: COURTESY OF LOFOTR VIKINGMUSEUM, PHOTO BY LINN OLSEN.

FIG 3. RECONSTRUCTED BUILDINGS AT THE ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY CENTRE (WIMBORNE, DORSET, SOUTH-WEST ENGLAND). SOURCE: COURTESY OF ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY CENTRE, PHOTO BY TONY HARRIS.

FIG 4. AERIAL VIEW OF THE LAKE DWELLING AT THE ĀRAIŠU EZERPILS ARHEOLOĢISKAIS PARK (DRABESI, VIDZEME, LATVIA) SOURCE: COURTESY OF ĀRAIŠU EZERPILS ARHEOLOĢISKAIS PARK.