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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Book Review: Experimentelle Archäologie in Europa, Bilanz 2010

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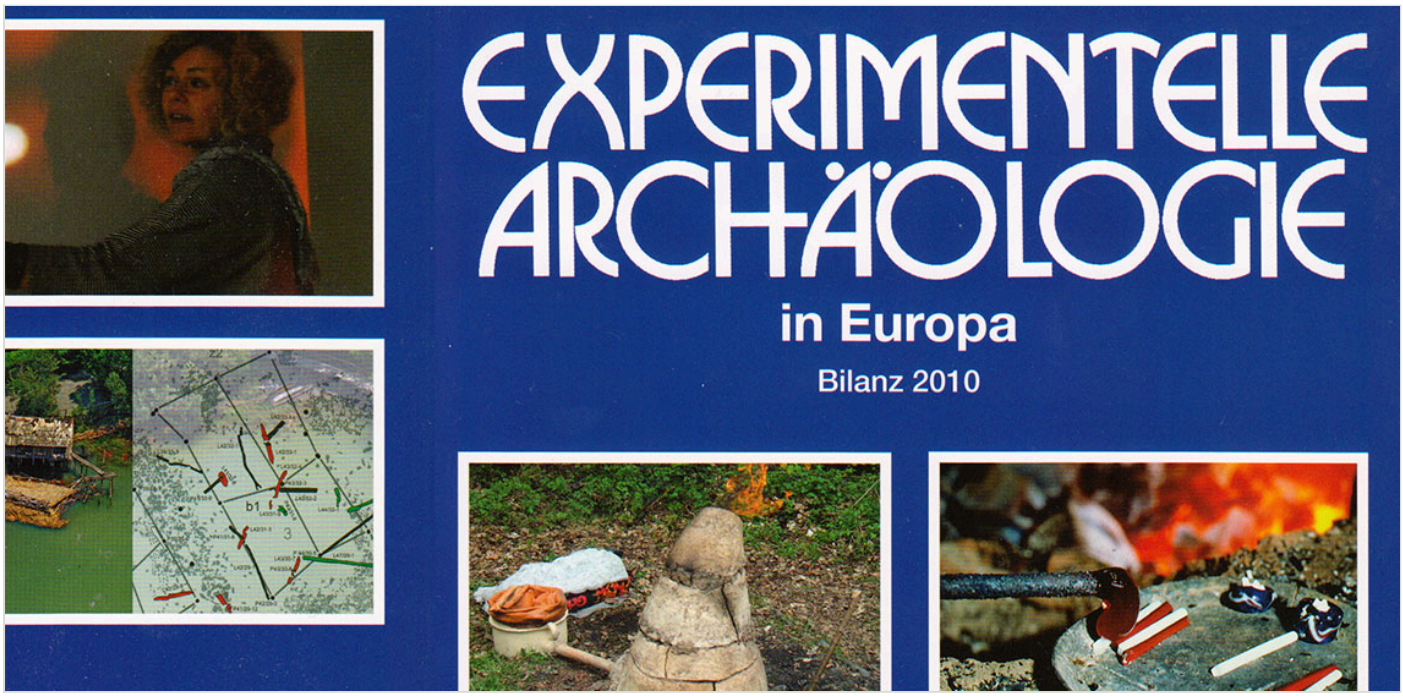

Twenty years of *Bilanz* of experimental archaeology – under this phrase the ninth volume in this series covers a series of articles which deal in different ways with questions in this range.

> The largest part of the book consists of

It starts off with four articles in which theoretic ideas about experimental archaeology are discussed in a variety of ways. Using the title 'Quo vadis experimental archaeology', Ulrike Weller takes a more or less critical approach but also shows

reports from the daily experimental reality which cover a very heterogeneous field of themes.

ways and possibilities for the future. Both Ullrich Brand-Schwarz and Andreas Willmy take up the theme 'living history' when discussing the possibilities for museum interpretation and its relation to archaeology. The fourth article is about the planned construction of a laboratory for experimental archaeology in Mayen. Michael Herdick discusses the possible connections with existing institutes (here the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum) and tourist offers.

The largest part of the book however consists of reports from the daily experimental reality which cover a very heterogeneous field of themes.

Tinaig Clodoré-Tissot's article is the only one in English. It describes the reconstruction of prehistoric musical instruments and the conclusions from these examples for experimental music archaeology. The origin of the article was a research project in which the prehistoric musical instruments of Europe were brought together. Following on from this set of data, a part of the instruments (bone whistles and flutes, blowing instruments from mussel shells, horns, clay whistles and clay drums) were made using specialist tools. The results cover information about the use of tools, time investment and handiness as well as to the way of playing the instruments.

Wulf Hein and Kurt Wehrberger present making of a copy of the well known 'Lion Man', an ivory figure from the upper Palaeolithic from Schwäbischer Alb. The object was made using flint tools and elephant ivory which did not only lead to a well executed version of the Lion Man but especially to a collection of experiences into the theoretic production process, what crafts were used, what tools and especially the investment of time needed to make it. References to the abilities of the maker compared to the original creator of the Lion Man are well described.

Thematically connected is the contribution by Leif Steguweit who discusses experiments in softening ivory. These originate from the fact that ivory is very tough; therefore working it with stone tools is only possible by using a lot of force and time. In the finds however, one sees not only very smooth surfaces but as well some which seemed to have been cut possibly with the material having been soaked before working. With his starting point in modern reflections, Steguweit did experiments on softening ivory with sorrel (oxalic acid) and nettle (formic acid) which lead to a clear improvement in the ability to cut the ivory. Factual evidence of these methods is according to Steguweit hardly to be expected and only indirectly possible by reviewing the cutting surfaces of the objects.

Friedrich W. Könecke and Jean Loup Ringot discussed the oval drilling of Neolithic stone axes.

They are found seldom, but could be well replicated by experiment using different types of tools (full drills, hollow drills). The question as to why these oval drillings in stone axes happened so rarely was impossible to answer, although the authors give to options: either the effort was too big or the knowledge on how to do it was not widely spread.

The field of tension between museum, experimental archaeology and interpreted knowledge was the theme of Peter Walter's article on drilling in museums. The history of the stone drilling machine starts in the 1820s and has ever since been a continuance in Stone Age technologies. However, there are no finds to substantiate it but its origin solely comes from looking at the artefacts (the drilled stone axes) and the question of 'how?'. It wasn't until the 1960s views changed and led to rejection of these stone drilling machines. Walter's article describes in detail the history of the stone drilling machine but he continues clearly with the theme of museum interpretation. He points to the problems of a Stone Age 'machine' without archaeological proof, but still sees a potential for the interpretation of knowledge – in the end not as a 'yes or no to the stone drilling machine' but a call for a conscious dealing with contents in museums and especially with the backgrounds of museum education and interaction.

Almost a 'classic' long term experiment is described by Gunter Schöbel in the article about the Hornstaad House at the archaeological open air museum Unteruhldingen. The construction of a house from a Stone Age example in 1996 was documented in full detail for the *Sendung mit der Maus* (a TV show to convey information to children, successful since 1971, editor) and as such gave an early image of the possibilities of experimental archaeology beyond the mere experiment. When the house collapsed during a storm in 2009 the first phase of research in and around the house was ended for the time being. Detailed documentation of the 'find' and its evaluation using a varied list of questions will lead to further interesting results, among others in relation to the displacement of construction materials after the collapse as well as the flora and fauna around.

Tattoos as jewellery of the human skin are the point of attention of Holger Junker who tried out on his own skin some techniques, materials and tools in an experiment which is not necessarily repeatable. The list of questions on tools, colours, the operation and treatment afterwards is large and could be dealt with for the most. The Conclusion is that a successful tattoo using the technical possibilities of a specific era was feasible. When classifying archaeological objects as tattoo tools, the experiment shows that a thickness of 0.2 mm is a criterion.

Daniel Modl wrote an extensive article on the making and cutting of plan convex cast cakes of bronze in Bronze Age Steiermark. Modl does not only introduce terminology and typology, he also discusses in great detail the production and the parameter from surface composition to

inner structure. This he compares with the archaeological sources from the Steiermark with hoard finds and documents their production and cutting traces. Using these and the questions rising from it to production and cutting, he tries to learn more by experimenting. These experiments are about how to cast, the tools used, material properties, the techniques of cutting and the effects on the production of the casting cakes which were designed to have a specific weight.

The article by Thomas Lessig-Weller is about the use of arrow heads for different tasks, his starting point is an exceptional arrow head from bone and antler which could also have been used against people. Lessig-Weler describes an experiment in three phases at the end of which he has a shooting simulation under repeatable conditions in a laboratory. Building from these first attempts of simulation, further data should be collected in the future combined with similar analysis. The question to the use or even the advantages of a conical bone tip instead of one of metal or flint has not however not been answered full yet.

Tine Gam-Aschenbrenner refers in her contribution mainly to her experiences in the production of glass beads under experimental archaeological circumstances. She points to two issues – the close relations between experiments and the archaeological sources and the critical appraisal of one's own abilities or previous experiences when dealing with glass or making glass beads. Interesting are how she classifies her experiments as an angle of interpretation, remarkable her highlighting of still open questions and areas of problems within the field of glass bead production, and her call for a more intensified research!

The final of the technical articles is by Ulrich Mehler on the Nibelungenlied – factually not a practice related article, but more focussed on the theoretical fundamentals and better fitting with the introduction of these proceedings. In pithy language, Mehler discusses the phenomenon that literary events – here from the Nibelungenlied – can turn into historic sources and therefore become the basis for historical research. As language scientist Mehler of course focuses on the literary text but besides that, his demands that how sources are addressed, in both archaeology and experimental archaeology are more than merely worth considering. His concluding '10 rules on how to handle each other' should be posted at every scientific working place.

At the very end is the report of the association EXAR including a review of the AGM 2009.

Conclusion

With the volume 9 (2010) in the series Experimentelle Archäologie in Europa we see a very varied and in general very exciting collection which combines both theoretical and purely practical reports in experimental archaeology. The overall successful mixture is recommended especially because a general perception of experimental archaeology in the

university world is not a given yet. It becomes clear that basic theoretical research is not finished at all and continues to offer an important, interested but above all much needed field of operation.
Concurrently however, practical experiments deliver time and time again new results and experiences for the most different research questions in different fields of archaeology. The fact that in these proceedings focus on prehistoric issues can be blamed on a generic concentration of experimental archaeology on the Bronze and Stone Age.
The articles range from real short work reports up to very long contributions full of results, from project plans, intermediate reports up to complete descriptions of experiments. The illustrations going with the articles are where necessary mostly in colour. Images are of a generally good quality, the right size and placed in direct relation to their text.
A compliment for mentioning the author addresses as well as adding summaries in English or German respectively. A critical remark is on the limited use of sub headers because of which the text does not always read fluently.
All in all the book should be get a wide group of readers of varied interest which can draw inspiration for their own research works from this.

Book information:

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