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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Event Review: Daily Life and Feasting in the Neolithic: Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of Experience in Experimental Archaeology at the Steinzeitdorf Albersdorf

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During summer 2014, just over 30 students from Archaeological Studies at the University of Hamburg, as well as four children, participated in a practical week of experimental

archaeology at the Steinzeitdorf Albersdorf.
In preparation for this week, the students attended a seminar at the University of Hamburg, held by lecturers T. Friedrich and B. Meller. The participants were introduced to the basic theories and skills involved in experimental archaeology as well as museum didactics. They were also given an overview of the archaeological context of the project, encompassing chronological frameworks, archaeological cultures and archaeological finds.

> “It can be concluded that the entire group of students, project attendants and supervisors and of course the museum staff had a great experiences and an immense sense of achievement during the practical week.

At the beginning of the seminar the students chose one of a variety of different task groups, mostly divided by different usable materials, in accordance of their own interest and—in some cases—former knowledge. The aim of the various groups was to formulate either a museum and heritage related didactic program or a practical experiment on the given topic. The archaeological contexts, approaches and goals of each group were presented to the other students. Meanwhile, the lecturers involved strived to provide a framework for the students to gain experience in archeo-techniques and to develop a greater understanding of the prehistoric life and materials.

The performances and experiments were presented during the designated week in Albersdorf, as the students were working during the day at the Steinzeitdorf, or at the nearby village or school. All the reconstructed houses, including the Mesolithic huts, were used as sleeping resources. Students stayed some of the evenings at the Steinzeitdorf to continue their projects, even after work time was over and the public audience had left. To be visible to the visitors, all members of the practical week—students and teachers—were dressed in linen, woollen or leather wear. The patterns were taken from Neolithic and Bronze Age figures and illustrations, as well as from burial finds from Central European contexts. Using the outcome of experimental work of before, more leather and colour textiles could be seen.

As in previous years, there were many visitors from the surrounding area, but a considerable amount of visitors came from further away, specifically to visit the Steinzeitdorf during the practical ‘student week’. Because of the higher frequency of visitors on Saturday and Sunday, the stay included a complete weekend. During the week, participants offered information to the public about the *OpenArch Project* as well as they could communicate their experiences in their respective groups. This was achieved either by answering the questions of bypassing people or through guided tours, which were held by alternating students.

Every year the week has a special theme. In 2014 the topic was “Daily Life and Feasts”, but not every group was able to transfer this into their projects. For example, some of the students mainly repaired broken objects (the clay oven, for the third time) or conserved things (raw

hides, bark) for future use. Utilising archaeological evidence was essential for all groups and topics, which is sometimes a limitation to realising of ideas. By combining findings from different geographical and cultural regions, good results were achieved nonetheless. The idea of 'feasting' was transformed in experiments to include musical objects, and the ongoing experimental brewing. The joint project of the construction of a sweat lodge was finished by the last day. The finishing touches and first experimental use of this building were carried out by the museums staff, but it is planned to return with some of the students in November 2014 to have also a first go.

The students also formed collaborative groups centred on the different raw materials available in Neolithic times:

1. Stone/Flint. The students were already introduced to the skill necessary to perform flint knapping in the previous year, so they produced not only flakes, scrapers and borers which were used by the other groups to perform their tasks, but focused on the various ways of manufacturing axes and and looked at the hafting of tools.
2. Bone/Antler and jewellery. This group focused on learning the basic skills as well. After that introduction small objects (mostly jewellery and needles) were produced. Drilling and punching holes, then investigating their shapes was one the goals of the group, which also were in charge of decorating clothing based on archaeological evidence, as well as investigating the practicality of wearing it on a daily basis. Clothing sometimes looked good, but was unsuitable for a hard working lifestyle, so it was hypothesized that some of the clothing and decoration found in various archaeological contexts would have been occasional wear, or 'Sunday Best'.
3. Clay/Pottery. This group were further divided into two distinct themes. On one hand, the manufacturing of vessels for the later daily use within the village was important. For that reason pottery made by students during the seminar, as well as the practical week, was fired in several sessions (Feldbrand). On the other hand, the theme of the week was integrated producing special pottery which is associated with burial rites in the archaeological research especially for Trinkopfer, or feasting at a burial site. The decoration application was an experiment done by one of the participants. The 'potters' were visited first by the public audience, so they offered an introductory guide to the Neolithic Life, and combined with the brewing experiment, cheered on the audience with a welcome drink!
4. Wood, bark and bast fibre. Two ongoing projects focussed on this material. Like the years before, containers, buckets and boxes as well as vessels were produced using different materials in various forms. The other project looked at the chaîne opératoire of vessels made of bur-bearing plants, known from various Neolithic sites in the Alpine regions.
5. Textile. This group was divided by the usage of varying materials, though there was a considerable amount of overlapping. One student group concentrated on dyeing textiles

(linen and wool) by using different plants, collected in the surrounding area of the Steinzeitdorf. The other group focused on the weaving loom, varying the way fibres, threads and material were produced.

6. Food. This experimental group is vitally important every year, but more so for an overall theme of daily life and feasting. This group prepared lunch for the whole group using only seasonal and archaeologically verified food. Everyday various dishes were presented, cooked and grilled on a fire fire, but due to the group size the main pot used was a metal one. Previous experiments had reconstructed ceramic pots like TBK pottery, but these did not survive the daily routine or the cold winters in the house.
7. Brewery. One experiment followed the process of brewing beer. Based on the archaeological record, different techniques can create (more or less!) drinkable beer. Various plant and herb combinations were tried, given that they would be available in the Neolithic, as demonstrated within pollen records. The group - and also the audience - were free to leave their taste impressions for research. The pottery and brewing groups also worked together to find pottery useful for the different processes of brewing.
8. Music. This group tried to manufacture all kinds of musical instruments presumed at the Stone Age times in various ways and using different materials. The flutes, drums and various percussion instruments were tested for use and sound. The flutes especially were produced focusing on the mouthpiece and its usefulness while playing.
9. Sweat Lodge. On the basis of ethnological and archaeological evidence the group attempted building a sweating hut. The research and gathering of materials lay in the hands of one student, but the actually building involved all participants in their spare time. Except for birch bark, all building materials such as stones, hazel root or earth were gathered in the surrounding area of the village. The construction was more or less finished by the end of the week. The remaining finishing touches were put in place by the museums staff.
10. Oven re-reconstruction. The outdoor oven, which had already been rebuilt twice before, had to be reconstructed again due to missing protective construction work. Because the remaining parts of the oven were in such bad shape, a new one was built next to the old one. The reuse of material was one of the questions of the construction group.
11. Leather. Two deer hides were pulped and scraped by using different lithic tools like those often found within Neolithic habitation sites, but bone scrapers, like those used by the indigenous inhabitants of North America, were also used. It was considered that tools of this material may be found in archaeological contexts, but not recognised due to perhaps resembling waste. The hides were preserved in salt to (re-)use them next year for ongoing tanning experiments.
12. Boat. The group returned after a two-year hiatus, and tried new ways of constructing the boat and use of fire/smoke for conserving the external leather skin of the boat. The

sequence of construction improved considerably, and the boat was fully useable after completion.

It can be concluded that the entire group of students, project attendants and supervisors and of course the museum staff had a great experiences and an immense sense of achievement during the practical week. The continual sunny, hot weather added to that sentiment. As was the case in the earlier years, some projects will be continued in concurrence with chance and necessity.

Extra information:

Date: Thursday, 18 July 2014 to Tuesday, 23 July 2014
Organized by: Archaeological-Ecological Centre Albersdorf (DE) / University of Hamburg, Archaeological Department.
Staff: Tosca Friedrich MA; Birte Meller MA ;Dr. Rüdiger Kelm
Number of Participants: >30 students, 4 children, 3 teachers and many visitors

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FIG 1. WORKING ALL TOGETHER BUILDING THE SWEAT HOUSE.

FIG 2. GETTING THE COW SKIN ATTACHED TO THE BOAT CONSTRUCTION.

FIG 3. COOKING FOOD FOR THE WHOLE GROUP AT THE FI REPLACE.

FIG 4. EVENING DAWN AT THE LAKE WITH THE REMAINING SOUND OF BULL-ROARER.

FIG 5. ARCHAEOLOGY STUDENTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG, PARTICIPATING IN A PRACTICAL WEEK OF EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY.