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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Book Review: Experimentelle Archäologie in Europa, Jahrbuch 2017

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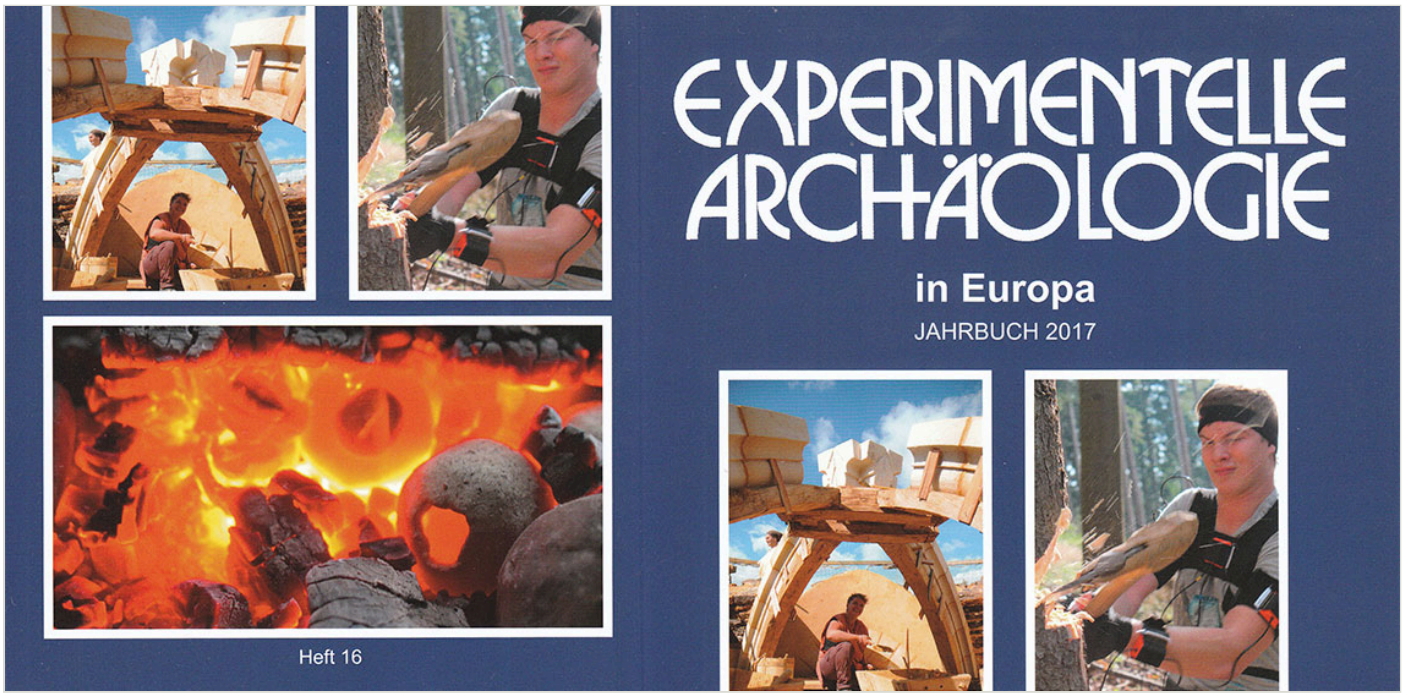

This volume of *Experimentelle Archäologie in Europa* does not only serve as 2017's year book of the European Association for the advancement of archaeology by experiment (EXAR), but also acts as a *Festschrift* dedicated to Professor Mamoun Fansa, who celebrated his 70th birthday. Mamoun Fansa is one of the most influential figures in establishing experimental archaeology as a means of disseminating research results and public engagement in

Germany, as well as central to the foundation of EXAR. Julia Heeb's introduction dignifies his many important achievements towards the discipline and his past and current work.

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Like previous issues of *Experimentelle Archäologie in Europa*, the book follows the same basic structure of three sections: archaeological experiments, reconstructions, and theory and dissemination. With twenty-one contributions, this is an impressive collection of case studies that cover a wide range of topics and approaches. From self-contained, small-scale studies on archaeometallurgy, textiles, glass and numismatics, to uses of experimental archaeology as tools for research and dissemination, all the way to virtual and physical reconstructions of medieval castles. It cannot be stressed enough that non-German speakers should not shy away from this rich resource of case studies. Although only five contributions are in English, English abstracts, bilingual captions and excellent illustrations throughout make it easy to follow the main arguments, approaches and workflow of most authors.

Due to the variety and scope of this volume, this review will focus on some of the most representative and exemplary case studies that either offer particularly new and exciting results and approaches or illustrate best practice in applying experimental archaeology. These should definitely be seen as strong reading recommendations.
Of all contributions in the first section, Reschreiter's *40 years of underground experiments* (45-59) is without a doubt the best example to illustrate the full potential of experimental archaeology. This chapter looks back on the long and successful tradition of experimental archaeology at the prehistoric salt mines of Hallstatt. Due to the fantastic preservation of organic material in Hallstatt, many artefacts are unique and the traditional archaeological approach of comparing is not always possible. Therefore, archaeologists in Hallstatt became early adapters of integrating experimental archaeology, and since the 1970s they use this approach in almost all aspects of their research to reconstruct the daily life of the prehistoric societies, who lived and worked around the mines. While most contributions in this and many other volumes might be very interesting and valuable case studies they are ultimately very self-contained, unlike Hallstatt's holistic approach which is the biggest strength of this chapter. It shows that experimental archaeology, even though often treated as such, is not just a side activity, but can be an integral part of the research itself. Reschreiter further illustrates how experimental archaeology is also fully integrated in public outreach, education and curatorial presentation: from hands-on workshops to 3D-models, not only focusing on tourism but also on the local population, the latter are often underrepresented target audiences.

One of the individual experiments that should be highlighted is Furger's comprehensive overview of various non-ferrous alloys, their processing, hardening and recrystallisation properties (25-44). Using archaeological, literary and iconographic sources as well as ethnographic comparisons, he systematically works various non-ferrous alloys in different ways to reproduce metallurgical properties of archaeological metal artefacts, meticulously documenting heat and work processes. Practical considerations such as using impure rather than industrially produced metal shows evidence of a very considerate approach. While highly technical, the author uses very accessible language and many illustrations which makes his workflow easy to follow.

Another experiment worth taking note of is *About the relationship of the coin image and the engraving tools* by Bruestle (52-95), who correctly critiques the lack of practical experience of numismatists who very often only engage theoretically with the production of coins without any hands-on experience. Bruestle gives a short but impressive overview of methods and tools for the engraving of coins.

The third section of this volume on theory and dissemination is particularly relevant for modern challenges and opportunities in the archaeology and heritage sectors, and deserves a close look. While containing very good contributions on experimental archaeology in open-air museums (Lobisser; Heeb) and digital approaches (Schubert and Zülch; Boneva), the chapters by Grömer on accidental dissemination of experimental archaeological textiles via online channels, and by Häußler on Guédelon (probably the most ambitious archaeological reconstruction so far) are a must-read.

Grömer (196-207) observed an interesting phenomenon. Patterns of prehistoric textiles are receiving great popularity among different groups and started spreading through online channels. Originally recreated as part of archaeological experiments, patterns were adapted by reenactors, handcrafters and even inspired artists and fashion designers. This reception and adaption beyond the academic sphere via the internet, particularly through virtual spaces such as online forums and social media, not only led to an unintentional dissemination of Iron Age textile patterns to a wider audience, but archaeologists also started to profit from an increasing exchange of ideas and feedback, creating a more democratic, collaborative approach of reconstructing and interpreting finds.

The last must-read chapter of this volume is Häußler's contribution on the famous Guédelon project in France, which aims to reconstruct a 13th century medieval castle through experimental archaeology and celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2017 (234-245). Despite the fact that the castle itself is usually the main highlight, this project has a far more holistic approach and included considerations far beyond the main objective. The location was intentionally chosen as it provided the natural resources required to build and operate a castle, such as running water, wood and stone. Apart from these considerations, an entire

industrial and professional infrastructure that is required for such a venture had to be reconstructed on the site. These include mills, workshops and medieval cranes which are built and operated by specialised workforces including carpenters, stone masons and many more. The project has an intrinsically participatory focus, giving everyone the opportunity not only to visit the site as a tourist, but also to contribute to the building and research process through their own labour force. Häußler illustrates how Guédelon is an almost perfect example of experimental archaeology, combining thorough research that aims to fill gaps within the archaeological and historical sources, with an elaborate and inclusive approach of public engagement, to bring the past closer to a wider audience.

In conclusion, it can be said that the scope of this volume will have something to offer to everyone who is interested in reconstructing past technologies, as well as modern examples of positive dissemination of archaeological research. Following Momoun Fansa's example, it is delightful to see that most case studies show clear evidence not only of how to operate experiments, but also how they are presented to the public as an educational tool.

Book information:

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