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## Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

### Conference Review: the EAA 2017 in Maastricht (NL)

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The annual conference of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) is an important venue for the presentation of any type of archaeology in Europe. This year, the conference was attended by about 1,800 archaeologists including about ten EXARC members. EXARC was involved in organising two sessions, one on live interpretation, and the other on experimental archaeology. We intend to be present again next year in Barcelona.

## Session - Live Interpretation



With societal impact becoming an increasingly important measure for academic success, many researchers look to contribute to modern society more directly and to greater effect. In humanities, experimental archaeology is particularly well-placed to convey the message of archaeological research to a wider audience. But what is archaeology's contribution to modern society?

This session, officially called "Using Live Interpretation, Living History / Reenactment and Museum Theatre to Interpret Archaeological Heritage" was organised by **EXARC members Vasilka Dimitrovska (Haemus, FYROM) and Marc van Hasselt (Novitas Heritage, NL)**. Heritage Sites use a number of tools to interpret their stories for the public. Live interpretation, also called costumed interpretation, uses live actors who portray the role of an historical persona. These characters tell the story more effectively than a static display, but also present a number of challenges.

Within the international community, the terminology surrounding heritage interpretation is under debate. Terms such as 'inclusiveness' and 'authenticity' are being questioned and their use is being challenged. UNESCO believes that tourism is changing and heritage sites, including archaeological sites, should be ready to provide the 'authentic experiences' tourists now pursue. But what is 'authentic' and how can this be quantified? Do people visiting European sites receive a European, inclusive story? Or does inclusiveness automatically include exclusion as well?

**Marc van Hasselt (NL)** gave the first presentation on the subject "reaching more people by locking them up". His company had developed Museum Escape - a pop-up escape room with an archaeological theme. Escape rooms are a popular activity, especially among 18 to 35 year olds. This target audience is traditionally hard to reach for institutions attempting to interest the public in archaeology and heritage. By using the medium of escape rooms, the subject can be presented in a new, challenging and playful way. Van Hasselt discussed the merits and pitfalls of escape rooms in museums.

**Samantha Hartford (US)** gave a good paper on wishes, visions and practicalities: creating a balance in living history presentation. Bringing the past to life is a visionary goal, and yet at its core, a practically impossible one as well. In our efforts to provide quality education and meet perceived visitor expectations, we struggle with the realities of limited time, material, information, money, especially at small living history sites. Compromises have to be made: but how can we ensure we are making the choices that best serve both our history and our visitors? By surveying reenactors, museum staff, and members of the public, this investigation offers insight into creating interpretation that is meaningful when faced with limited resources.

The third and final presentation was given by **Réka Vasszi (HU)**, also an EXARC member, on her experience at Csiki Pihenőkert and dissertation project "vacation in the past – effective heritage interpretation".

Heritage sites, including archaeological ruins, need to be interpreted in an appealing way. Tourists require unique experiences at exclusive places. These visits should be an immersive journey into the past. The design and planning should be of high quality in order to play a vital role in the experience economy. How could heritage sites design memorable experiences? How can gamification be implemented? How does Live Action Role Play (LARP) work as an educational tool? Vasszi explored these questions, using various case studies concluding that interpretation is very effective in creating a memorable experience and reaching long-lasting learning goals.

## Session - Experimental Archaeology

The second session with an EXARC taste was officially called "Illuminating the past, enlightening the future: experimental archaeology pioneering for societal development." Organisers were **Daniël Postma (Archaeo Build, NL)**, **Chloe Duckworth (Newcastle University, UK)** and **Artūrs Tomsons (Latvian National History Museum, LV)**.

With societal impact becoming an increasingly important measure for academic success, many researchers look to contribute to modern society more directly and to greater effect. In humanities, experimental archaeology is particularly well-placed to convey the message of archaeological research to a wider audience. But what is archaeology's contribution to modern society? This session aimed to explore how archaeological skills and insights can be employed on a more substantial and fundamental level, for the benefit of current and future generations.

The field of biomimicry (biomimetics) already draws inspiration from 4 million years of natural evolution, acknowledging the innovative solutions nature found for many challenges analogous to our own. Similarly, ancient societies have dealt with such challenges, coping with environmental disasters, economic crises, cultural integration and political suppression with varying success. Much like biomimicry, Archaeology may employ these past results to inform current innovative design processes.

**Daniël Postma** kicked off giving a perspective from the Netherlands on archaeologically inspired eco-building.

Settlement archaeologists have many interests in common with modern eco-builders. Particularly with regard to experimental archaeology, mutual interests exist in natural building material, low-tech tools and techniques, as well as concepts of design, use and maintenance. Postma argued that these common grounds support an equally beneficial

cooperation between archaeologists and the current building community. The case studies he presented demonstrate the potential interest for modern archaeological architecture for its users, as well as the return that archaeological researchers may expect from this approach.

**Theodor Aurelian (RO)** then continued with a presentation on developing pottery-making skills in a local rural community at Sultana-Malu Rosu (east Romania). Experimental archaeology is a method that aims to answer specific questions using controlled trials, representing a bridge between theory and method of analysis. The purpose of this seven-year project was to recreate Gumelnita pottery, using techniques, methods and materials easily available to the prehistoric communities of Sultana. The archaeologists turned to the elders from the local community for help in identifying local raw materials. In doing so, they have permanently involved the local community in the research project. After all this time, this experimental project had a positive impact especially among the younger generation, actively participating along with archaeologists and opening possibilities for sustainable local development of small business.

**Artūrs Tomsons (LV)** concluded the session with a paper on the development of his Baltic experimental archaeology school. Previous editions had been taking place at the Āraiši Archaeological Museum Park, but for 2017 Tomsons moved to Lucavsala's Island in Riga. The plot Tomsons with the "Archaeo Club Latvia" rents is used for educational activities, including primitive technology, experiential and experimental archaeology. The purpose is to create a "demo" version of a functioning miniature archaeological park/garden, where students and all participants can learn additional prehistoric skills and get knowledge about methods of experimental archaeology (which they cannot get in university) and in this process, abandoned territories are re-cultivated and brought back to life.

During the discussion following these papers, it was suggested that archaeology does not sell itself well enough, partly because relevant information is not published well enough. Archaeologists often still do not see they have a role in modern society, apart from a purely scientific one.

Architects usually have a far larger role than archaeologists when using archaeology as inspiration for modern day building. Research questions are not often enough leading to societal development. Archaeologists can show that more variety is possible in techniques, while architects too often merely adapt an idea without looking into the backgrounds of it, the why and how. In this job, archaeologists and architects should work as a team instead of only looking at their own priorities. Archaeologists need to look better at the questions living in society; museums can serve as community centres. Craft is a central element.

## Crafts session

Based on this emphasis on crafts when discussing experimental archaeology, we joined the all-day session on "crafts: reconsidering social context, production and division in prehistoric and non-literate societies". This session was organised by **Sophia Adams (University of Bristol, UK)**, **Krista Vajanto, (Aalto University, FI)** & **Riina Rammo (University of Tartu, EE)**. Unfortunately, we were only able to see about ten of the thirty papers in this session.

Archaeological research into craft and production tends to define different crafts based on the material of the final artefact: bronze, textile, ceramic and so on. This session provided an opportunity to compare the evidence across these divisions to explore alternative ways in which labour, production and technology might have been classified in the past. Focus of the session was acquiring a holistic view of the social context of craft.

**Helen Chittock (UK)** discussed Iron Age artists, considering the evidence for an Early Celtic art design skillset. She looked into jewellery, weapons and vessels, mainly made from bronze or gold. The precarious status of the notion of prehistoric 'art', and the lack of named Early Celtic Art practitioners mean that the people who created these designs are not considered 'artists', and have remained anonymous and elusive. She discerns two different types of skill: the skill of creating designs that fitted into the style using a specific lexicon of motifs, and the skill of executing these designs using tools and techniques. Whilst designing Early Celtic Art objects required a very specific knowledge of the correct motifs, the production process utilised cross-craft skills and pulled in multiple craftspeople and materials.

**Beatriz Marin-Aguilera (UK)** then continued on Textile Production And Social Dynamics In Southwestern Iberia In The Late 6th-5th Century BC. Textile craft and production has been often neglected in archaeology. However, textile production implies a long and complex 'chaîne opératoire' in which many and diverse artisans, materials and techniques are actively involved. The study of textile manufacture assists us in gaining a better understanding of the social and economic dynamics of craft production and consumption in prehistoric and pre-industrial societies.

**Caroline Jeffra (NL), EXARC member**, made a point about integration of crafting spaces. The Aegean Bronze Age was a time of deepening craft knowledge, and excavations at sites around the Aegean have revealed so-called artisan's quarters and workshops.

Jeffra focussed on the ways that these areas are embedded in their contexts, exploring the extent to which craft activity was rooted in the everyday social landscape of people based on the archaeological evidence. This can lead to a better understanding of the integration of crafting spaces into social landscapes, while perhaps highlighting the potential interconnections between craftspeople working to produce items belonging to different material classes.

**Julia Farley (UK)** gave the final paper of the day, on a Holistic Approach to Making and Dwelling in Iron Age Britain. Archaeological material culture is traditionally studied by specialists in particular materials. This effectively divorces finished objects from the complex web of cross-craft interactions which produced them, and also from other aspects of the inhabited landscapes and architecture of Iron Age communities, such as landscape divisions, structures and earthworks.


Farley took a process-focused, craft-based approach, using the site of Staple Howe (in North Yorkshire, UK) as a case study, presenting it as a 'made world' formed by the interactions of humans, animals, and the environment.

Farley's approach was successful in seeking to use material culture to give a deeper understanding of the lived experience of ancient communities by investigating the relationship between craft production and social organisation, and how 'making' shapes lives, experiences, and landscapes.

## Conclusion

The EAA is a melting pot with a huge number of archaeologists, 400 sessions and about 1800 lectures. Even the popular sessions have an audience of maximum 100 people but the fact that you can join six or more mini-conferences in just a few days makes the EAA very attractive.

**We hope to see you again in Barcelona, 5-8 September 2018: <https://www.e-a-a.org/EAA2018/>.**

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