

Historische Archäologie

In January 2013 the annual meeting of the Society of Historical Archaeology (USA) and the Society of Post-Medieval Archaeology (GB) took place in Leicester.

On this occasion, Paul Courtney had organized a session on "Historical Archaeology in Europe". Sadly, Paul passed away only a few months later. The following paper is the manuscript of his introductory paper to this session. During the conference he had agreed to publish the paper in our journal. We are grateful to his wife Yolanda Courtney, who agreed to the posthumous publication. The paper is consistent with the original manuscript and was only altered according to the guidelines of the journal.

During the conference Paul Courtney was presented with the Award of Merit of the Society of Historical Archaeology for his contributions as longtime supporter and facilitator of scholarly ties between Europe and North America. This article is dedicated to his memory.

The editors

Paul Courtney †

European Historical Archaeology Transatlantic Perspectives

This is an informal introduction to a session on European historical (post-medieval) archaeology organised by Natascha Mehler and myself at the January 2013 Society for Historical Archaeology conference held in Leicester, UK. It attempts to outline some of the distinctiveness and diversity of European post-medieval archaeology, especially in contrast to North America where the subject has boomed in recent times.

The last few decades have seen an unprecedented growth in the archaeology of the post-medieval period especially in countries like the U.S.A. and UK and more sporadically across Continental Europe. Most notable has been the rise of historical archaeology in the U.S.A. where the Society for Historical Archaeology has some 2100 members and numerous colleges teach specialist courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The origins of American research can be traced to late 19th century and early 20th century interest in historic houses. The post-World War Two era saw excavations associated with restoration projects at sites like Colonial Williamsburg and Jamestown, and rescue/salvage excavation on sites such as forts in the mid West and in the city of Philadelphia. In 1967 the Society of Historical Archaeology was founded. A major stimulus came only a few years later with environmental legislation under President Nixon. This created a program of commercial archaeology to assess and record sites on federal land or on projects with federal funding. Most importantly it required specialist historical archaeologists to supervise projects of that period promoting a growth in university training. Since then there has been a huge upsurge in college courses, disserta-

tions, theses and publications. Even when I started buying books on historical archaeology in the mid-1980s I could aim at being comprehensive but have long since had to restrict myself to increasingly specialist interests.

American archaeology differs from European archaeology in that its intellectual base is firmly rooted in anthropology (BINFORD 1962 a; COURTNEY 1999). This is especially the U.S. tradition of cultural anthropology with its long standing emphases on holism, cultural relativism, patterning and behaviour, ultimately rooted in the work of German immigrant Franz Boas (1858–1942). Boas, despite having a PhD in physics from the University of Kiel, became interested in ethnology of the Inuit in the Arctic and founded academic anthropology in the U.S.A. (COURTNEY 2009, 170). Historical archaeology is normally studied as part of an anthropology degree with full specialism taking place at post-graduate level. Emphasis on post-graduate qualifications and anthropological connections has contributed to the highly theorised nature of the subject in America. One can see a number of fashionable or dominant ideologies over the decades: through the scientific functionalism of Lewis Binford (e.g. BINFORD 1962 b) and Stanley South (e.g. SOUTH 1977), the structuralism and symbolic analysis of Jim Deetz (e.g. DEETZ 1996) and more recent post-structuralist approaches.

Europeans, however, especially those working in patriarchal systems where deference to superiors and teachers is highly valued, sometimes fail to grasp the sheer intellectual variety to be found in American archaeology. The diversity of the country and the number and range of institutions provide a home for many different approaches and, despite the emphasis on the anthropology PhD, have allowed many a maverick to develop a successful career. Diversity at a practical level also reflects the sheer size and regional variation in physical geography, also the colonial history of the U.S.A. from the English settlement of Virginia, to French and Spanish occupations of the south. Americans have also played a key role in expanding archaeology of the past to include the recent past and even the present, for instance, the Arizona garbage project which analysed contemporary household waste (RATHJE / MURPHY 2001). Nevertheless, the preoccupations of historical archaeology including capitalism, ethnicity, gender and globalism also reflect the contemporary concerns and central role of their country in the world. Also, one should not forget Canadian historical archaeology which reflects an eclectic mix of British, French, American, historical and anthropological influences. Many of us were inspired by the pioneering program of research and publication on post-medieval material culture by Parks Canada, since devastated by financial cuts.

The origins of post-medieval archaeology in Europe are multi-faceted but one can point to the increasing recovery of artefacts during 19th century urban development and their collection by both museums and private collectors. Indeed we tend to forget the important role collectors played in the development of our subject, though still sometimes plagued by their artistically inspired classificatory systems. The growth of urban rescue archaeology in Britain, especially after World War Two, was another important source of inspiration. Most early excavations were targeted at the Roman and increasingly the medieval past. Post-medieval finds tended to be more accidental, for example, and pits and cess-pits in gardens produced an early emphasis on ceramic studies. In post-war London, the official committee for rescue work on bombed sites confined itself to Roman and medieval remains. However, Adrian Oswald and his young protégé, Ivor Noël Hume, at the Guildhall Museum stepped in to investigate post-medieval sites. In 1957 Noël Hume with his wife Audrey, emigrated to Virginia to head the archaeology program at Colonial Williamsburg, creating an early trans-Atlantic link and introducing Anglo-Scandinavian approaches to excavation and artefacts (though to some a historical worm in the apple of American anthropological archaeology). The Society of Post-Medieval Archaeology (SPMA) was founded in 1966 from its roots in a research group for the study of post-medieval ceramics. It represented a coalition of museum curators, excavators and the strong British

amateur tradition in studying a range of areas from vernacular buildings and industrial archaeology to artefacts. The amateur tradition was often encouraged by that now embattled phenomenon, the adult education class, which created a large body of published scholarship and a generation of amateur experts, many of whom became professionals and even academics. SPMA initially ended its official remit in 1750 in deference to the already established, if overlapping, discipline of industrial archaeology with its own groups, though it often published papers from the later period in its journal. The society now extends its remit to include even contemporary archaeology.

The growth of rescue excavation, both state and commercially organised, and of excavations associated with heritage restoration has also helped the growth of post-medieval archaeology in many European countries. In 1997 Marco Milanese founded the annual journal *Archaeologia Postmedievale* in Italy. More recently the Czech Republic has produced a biannual conference volume, *Studies in Post-Medieval Archaeology* published in English. In Germany one can note the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Archäologie des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit who publish a journal which includes both medieval and post-medieval archaeology. In the last two decades there has been growth in the teaching of post-medieval archaeology, usually termed historical archaeology, in British universities associated with an Anglo-American theorised approach. Connections between British and American archaeology have grown in recent years encouraged by a common language, the internet, cheap air fares and availability of academic travel grants. This has culminated in this Leicester conference, the second SHA annual meeting to be held in the UK after York in 2005. Anglo-American academic institutions have also extended theory into Mediterranean archaeology as they brought their studies forward from the Classical era. Theory has also been influential in areas of Scandinavian archaeology, but elsewhere tends to be more sporadic and often dependant on individuals in academic positions.

To what extent can we speak of a European historical archaeology in a continent of so many polities, languages and distinct cultures? Historically, the intellectual framework of European archaeology is more closely related to the humanities, history, geography and classical studies, than anthropology (COURTNEY 2010). We also live in cultures which have evolved out of the feudal past and post-medieval archaeology largely grew out of medieval archaeology. Many European post-medievalists were initially medievalists though this is becoming less so especially in the UK (COURTNEY 1999). Nevertheless, I would argue that, despite the differences, Europeans do share a common sensibility distinct from America. We live in smaller, older countries with generally less individualistic societies. European topographic regions are often small with major changes in soil, agriculture, cuisine and dialect within short distances. I am sure this has affected my own view on globalism which sees the world as interconnected by a complex set of networks defined by physicality, geographic inertia, shifting trade and political alliances and custom regimes. One also can point to widespread themes like the renaissance, reformation and counter-reformation and industrialisation which interest many Europeans. These days, however, we can't even agree if feudalism is a useful or even real concept while that current trendy notion of modernity has been suggested to begin in virtually every century over the last millennium.

Certainly, considerable differences exist across Europe. Anglo-Scandinavian style stratigraphic excavation and the Harris matrix have spread through much of northern and western Europe but become rarer as one goes eastward. As already mentioned, theory plays an important role in the UK and parts of Scandinavia, yet some European archaeological traditions such as in Germany and France, have inherited anti-theoretical stances based on 19th century traditions of scientificism and romanticism. Natascha Mehler knows only too well my frustration at reading yet another German empirical study which, when you think it will conclude with some interesting comments on social and historical context ends with something like 'this study has produced an interesting database'. There are also major differences in what is

considered important between countries and cultures. A Polish survey I recently read concentrated on national origins while failing to mention the renaissance, a phenomenon which had considerable impact on central Europe. A French study would undoubtedly repeatedly reference the renaissance, but might well fail to mention capitalism that concept so beloved of Anglo-American archaeologists and even Fernand BRAUDEL (1979).

European post-medieval archaeology is still overshadowed by the concentration on earlier periods, but the end of the Cold War has seen those of us in the West rediscover the rich renaissance material cultures of central Europe and become aware of the new work on Ottoman archaeology in countries like Hungary (e.g. BARAM/CARROLL 2000). New interpretative approaches are also growing. However, we also face future problems given the economic crisis. Governments are not likely to encourage archaeology when increasing spending on soup kitchens. A major break on development is fewer universities teaching specialist courses, stocking libraries and promoting dissertations and theses. Many post-medievalists work in the commercial and heritage sector and may be on modest salaries especially in the poorer European countries, with limited access to international conferences and literature.

The internet, however, offers an important new opportunity for communication. Anglo-American universities and societies like SHA and SPMA also have a potential role in helping to develop archaeology in less rich countries. However, they should do so in a spirit of learning as well as teaching. Not all Europeans see Anglo-American theory as their saviour, and in quarters it is viewed as little more than a form of ethno-centric, academic colonialism. Certainly Europeans have alternative sources of theory, for instance, in addition to scholars like Natascha Mehler and Erki Russow familiar with UK and U.S. approaches. New interpretative work is also drawing on native traditions of sociology and social history. Folk studies have also long played an important role in many European countries, including Germany, in providing theoretically informed work on material culture. If it wasn't for folk museums one would hardly be aware of the former ethnic diversity, especially prior to World War Two, of many eastern countries. However, whether this role will continue is uncertain, as the academic branch of the subject rebranded as European ethnology becomes increasingly focused on well-funded modern sociological issues like migration and integration.

In conclusion, European post-medieval archaeology is likely to maintain a distinctive and diverse character while also critically absorbing influences from U.S.-style historical archaeology. To be effective it has to reflect its diverse cultural roots while also being open to outside influences, albeit critically, and able to challenge long standing beliefs. However, anything which brings us together in discussion and debate like this conference is ultimately to the good. Two christmases ago I found myself on a train from Regensburg to Nuremburg and talking to a fellow passenger who turned out to be the partner of Jim Deetz's oldest son – the world is often smaller than we think.

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Impressum

Imprint:
ISSN 1869-4276

Editing:
Natascha Mehler, Wien

Technical edition and layout:
Holger Dieterich, Kiel

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