"Historical Archaeology" is a term used differently by the variously different archaeological traditions found worldwide, but all definitions and uses have in common an emphasis on periods with so-called dense tradition. This generally means that the archaeological material sources are accompanied by written records. The upper limit of the period dealt with is seen differently around the globe. In the second half of the 20th century the research focus lay primarily in the 16th to 18th centuries and it is only since the 1990s that complexes from the 19th and 20th centuries have been increasingly the subject of research.

In the USA the term has been established for more than 40 years. The "Society for Historical Archaeology" (SHA) was founded there in 1967. The society is concerned with combining the analysis of archaeological remains with other (textual) sources for the period since the arrival of the first Europeans in the New World. The focus of "Historical Archaeology" in the US therefore lies in the period after 1500. The publication of "In small things forgotten" by James Deetz (1977) was groundbreaking in this respect. The society publishes the journal "Historical Archaeology" since 1967. The "International Journal of Historical Archaeology" (since 1997) on the other hand is somewhat different, providing a transnational platform.

Other archaeologies include "Garden Archaeology", "Battlefield Archaeology", "The Archaeology of punishment sites (Richtstättenarchäologie)" or "Contemporary Archaeology" (Buchli / Lucas 2001), that is the extension of archaeology into the late 20th and 21st centuries. This illustrates a trend recognisable in other areas of archaeological research. All these special archaeologies use similar or equal
methods, sources and questions and are part of a “Historical Archaeology” (Hicks / Beaudry 2006; Hall / Silliman 2006).

The term “Historical Archaeology” was introduced to Europe somewhat later. The ‘Anglo-Saxon’ “Society of Post-Medieval Archaeology” (SPMA) was established in 1967, initially focussing on the period between 1500 and 1750 i.e. more or less the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Its journal “Post-Medieval Archaeology”, is-sued since 1967, is also concerned with younger themes. The journal also covers continental Western Europe (Portugal, Spain, Northern France and Benelux), not least because of the important role of these areas in the extra-European expansion.

In recent years the term “Historical Archaeology” has been adopted in Scandinavia as well, but it is there usually limited to the era from the migration period to the modern period, defining itself in opposition to Classical Archaeology.

In Eastern Central Europe medieval and post-medieval archaeology has been practiced since the late 1980s before the political turns. Here “Historical Archaeology” expanded immensely at the end of the 20th century, as can be seen in a number of periodicals.

German-speaking Europe still predominantly talks about the archaeology of the modern period (“Neuzeit”). This can be understood as an extension of medieval archaeology, both institutionally (e.g. by the German Society for Medieval and Post-Medieval Archaeology, DGAMN) and in publications. The field developed rather late for various reasons, one of which is the ongoing view that the scope of Pre- and Early History is limited to the first millennium A.D., a circumstance that has blocked development considerably. Another important reason is the strict division between the archaeological and standing buildings sections of the heritage agencies.

That part of Europe saw extensive discussion about the term and meaning of “Medieval Archaeology”, but similar thoughts about “Post-Medieval Archaeology” took place rather late. Short articles by I. Ericsson (1995, 2002) were followed by a contribution by R. Schreg (2007) about Post-Medieval Archaeology. A discussion about “Historical Archaeology”, its methodology and content, has been initiated by S. Frommer (2007) only recently. His use of the term “Historical Archaeology” is largely limited to the historic character and the historic conclusions of medieval archaeological sources however. At the same time his approach is an attempt at a clear demarcation from prehistoric archaeology.

The term “Historical Archaeology” is being used by some in German-speaking Europe for pragmatic reasons as a pendant to prehistoric archaeology and to avoid cumbersome constructs such as the “Archaeology of Early History”, the “Archaeology of the Early Middle Age”
or “Medieval and Post-Medieval Archaeology”. But the term should not be simply pragmatically understood, it also means an approach different to that of Prehistoric Archaeology. A. Andrén’s (1998) approach is stringent and consequent. His major methodological criterion for “Historical Archaeology” is the parallel presence of written and archaeological sources, therefore logically recognising globally different absolute periodical starting points. Phases with written and visual sources with mostly etic character (early middle ages, early history), providing a partial external view on European circumstances, are to be distinguished from phases with dense emic sources (mainly from the later middle ages), which mirror an internal view of the culture being studied, an aspect which we intend to emphasize in this online journal.

Nowadays, the excavation of medieval and post-medieval sites is a major part of the work of archaeological heritage agencies. Medieval contexts and finds have been analysed critically and comprehensively, after an initial period in which they were discussed uncritically and in isolation. In German-speaking Europe, however, there is no real methodological or theoretical forum for post-medieval themes. This is a gap we would like to fill. The online journal "Historische Archäologie" wishes explicitly to present research and analysis from the late medieval period and the modern period in all its aspects. Its time frame ranges from the 14th/15th century until today.

“Historical Archaeology” traditionally involves subjects such as European expan-

sion in the early modern period or industrialization. With this new journal we also wish to build a bridge to eastern Central Europe and to Scandinavia, regions that in the early modern and later periods were by no means border areas and peripheries, but instead saw cultural developments and independent phenomena, which have been increasingly appreciated in archaeology since the 1990s.

We wish to offer young scientists and "established" colleagues an opportunity to present their research. By this we don't primarily mean data structure reports, but are asking instead for well-founded, methodologically or theoretically orientated papers, which are likely be discussed in professional circles. All different sources groups (archaeology, documents, visual sources and oral history) should be incorporated, analysed and evaluated in a complementary fashion to answer the questions asked. This is the only way comprehensive cultural scientific and historic conclusions can be reached.

It is repeatedly said with regret in archaeology that there is hardly any professional interchange between English and German-speaking colleagues due to the language barrier. This is why we wish to publish many articles either in English or at the very least with a detailed English
summary. Only in this way can we draw international attention to research from this language area and take part in international discussion.

References

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