

Experimental Archaeology in the Media

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Introduction

Scientists have come a long way in their experimental approach during history of such young discipline as archaeology. All started with simple interpretations of tools function, gradually through their reconstructions they came to physical – chemical, mechanical and efficiency tests of the tool properties. Following modern scientific flow – experiment is often seen as a computer simulation. Somewhere in between has emerged an idea of presenting the results of experiments to the public. At the start there were only few who listened but finally some experiments were planned only with audience in mind, for example the building of reconstructions of prehistoric dwellings or megaliths which are meant only to impress. A special chapter in experimental publicity goes to Thor Heyerdahl expeditions. The entire world followed the preparations and the adventures on radio and TV. Since the 1950's no large experiments have occurred without media assistance.

1. The Archaeological Fair Phenomenon

Meanwhile, in Poland no public attention had been given to archaeological experiments (partially due to the political situation). However, this has changed quite dramatically since an archaeological fair, a new form of open air entertainment appeared.

The first experimental archaeology show shown on Polish TV was filmed in 1990 at Krzemionki Opatawskie, in the vicinity of a prehistoric flint mining complex. The event lasted for two days and the TV exposure resulted in the doubling of the visitors on the second day. Since then the number of participants became directly linked to the media presence. Young, developing TV stations eagerly include spectacular archaeological outdoor fairs, showing them as huge popular events which is often misleading. The participation of archaeologists became standard (next to pop concert, clown show, playground and grilled sausages). In a peak season (spring to early fall) it became difficult to find a free weekend on your agenda. Every tiny historical town longed for its own knight contest and craftsman's show. This resulted in a lowering of quality and professional approach to experiment. The media much preferred a performance to an actual scientific reconstruction. The largest Polish annual experimental fair at Biskupin may be viewed as a typical example. Many archaeologists who were conducting their own experiments left the event to avoid associating their work with such a circus. On the other hand I presume that the audience will want a change as well, but it might take time. This draws a thick line between archaeological experiment and archaeological fair.

2. Experimental Archaeology as Seen in TV Documentaries

A quite opposite type of experimental archaeology is presented in TV documents. The first one I participated in, was also filmed at Krzemionki Opatowskie, and reconstructed some aspects of Neolithic flint mining. The film contained neither fable nor pretense. All the experimental scenes illustrated various concepts in limestone working, flint acquisition, transport and finally flint knapping. The next step was participation in a program called "Sonda" in the 1980's. This programme belonged to a weekly series of a very scientific nature where the experiment itself was often used to prove or discard theories. It elevated the status of archaeological experiment by dedicating an entire programme to flint tools and their manufacture. These two events inspired me to popularize archaeology further in the media and I became a co-author of a few series of experiment based programs for PR I TVP. Initially these were only 15 minutes long stories dedicated to a particular prehistoric artifacts such as: the bow, axe, hand axe or pottery. Archaeological comments were illustrated with costume scenes. The series became very popular, so was given more air time. Then we started to reconstruct such prehistoric aspects of life as: tool processing, house construction, hunting, food acquisition and so on. Archaeologists presented the actual techniques of tool manufacture or assumed behaviors. Another series had a slightly different formula and pictured children during their peregrinations into the past, so the experiments were designed to suit them. This was also a hit. The last serial dealt

with the subject of human origins and combined costume performances with scientific discussion between two disagreeing commentators. The action took place on numerous authentic archaeological sites in Poland, and ended chronologically with early farming in the Neolithic.

3. Experimental Archaeology vs. Survival

The last decade has seen in Poland a rise in the popularity of so called "survival art". Many adults find entertainment through various forms of scouting. Natural habitat and nature, a lack of civilization is in fashion. People wish to survive in the wilderness equipped only with some basic tools and their overall knowledge. So some knowledge of North American Indian experience becomes handy in such conditions. I managed to fit some experimental archaeology into such survival TV series, as prehistoric people of stone age seem to have a lot in common with North American Indians. These series showed that one can survive with no tourist equipment in the Polish forest habitat as well as if armed with a modern survival kit. I showed step by step how to make clothes, basic wooden, bone and flint tools, acquire food using different hunting and gathering techniques and finally to build a shelter and secure transport. The completed series was unfortunately the last archaeologically based documentary filmed by Polish public TV. It is even more depressing when one realizes that such popular channels as National Geographic, Discovery or Planet have built their popularity mostly on such archaeological and adventure series but the commercializing Polish public TV preferred to move

to soap operas instead. Although various re – runs of our programs always awake new interest in young viewers – none of the new budgets have included finances for new projects of this type.

4. Future – multimedia packets

A few years have passed but the popularity of our TV series has resulted in their reediting as educational packets together with a methodological handbook for teachers.

Finally, it must be considered a great achievement that such an experimental archaeological series was officially approved by the Polish Ministry of Education and listed as a supplementary program for secondary and tertiary education.

Summary

Die experimentelle Archäologie in Medien

Archäologie ist ein populärer, besonders durch das Fernsehen ausgenutzter Medialisationsgegenstand. Gleich nach den an ausserordentlichen archäologischen Entdeckungen gegründeten Filmen gehören die archäologischen Dokumente zu den beliebtesten Sendungen. Dagegen wird die experimentelle Archäologie viel weniger in Medien präsentiert, und wenn sie ans Licht kommt, dann meistens als eine "live" Reportage aus Messen und Festivals. Um so mehr überraschend war es, dass das polnische Fernsehen einige auf der experimentellen Archäologie gegründete Serien vorbereitet hat. Die Sendungen waren vor allem für die Jugend bestimmt, sie erweckten jedoch viel Interesse unter Erwachsenen. Die Programme stellten einzelne Aktivitäten des vorzeitlichen Menschen vor, zum Beispiel Nahrung- und Wassergewinnung, Werkzeugherstellung und –benutzung, Bekleidungsherstellung oder Rekonstruktion eines Wohnungsbaus. Die detaillierte Erklärung war mit der Beschreibung der modernen Methoden der archäologischen Interpretation verbunden. Die Popularität solcher Sendungen erweckte später die Ausgabe der Lehrbände, die ausser Filmen auch ein Handbuch für Lehrer und Erzieher enthielten. Das Projekt

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war dermassen erfolgreich, dass es offiziell als ein Ergänzungsprogramm für Mittel- und Hochschulen durch das polnische Ministerium für Schulwesen eingeordnet hat.

L' expérimentation archéologique et les médias

L' archéologie est un sujet très médiatisé, et la télévision s' en fait son rapporteur favori. Les thèmes les plus souvent retenus appartiennent aux documentaires archéologiques juste après les films traitant de découvertes exceptionnelles. En revanche l' archéologie expérimentale est beaucoup moins représentée et si parfois elle apparaît ce n' est qu' à l' occasion de compte rendu de festivals, de marché traditionnel. Cependant, la télévision polonaise a diffusé quelques émissions sur l' archéologie expérimentale. Elles étaient destinées à un public d' adolescents mais elles ont également rencontré l' intérêt des adultes. Les émissions présentaient les activités quotidiennes des populations protohistoriques, comme l' acquisition de nourriture, d' eau, la confection d' outils et leurs utilisations, la confection de vêtements ou encore la reconstruction d' habitats. Le commentaire détaillé était lié avec la description des méthodes modernes de l' investigation archéologiques. Grâce à la popularité de ces émissions une édition de plusieurs volumes à finalité éducative contenant des manuels méthodologiques pour les professeurs et pédagogues a été lancé. Le projet a été couronné de succès avec son classement officiel par le ministère de l' éducation nationale polonaise comme un programme complémentaire destiné aux écoles secondaires et aux universités.

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Archeologie je populárním předmětem medializace, zvláště využívaným televizí. Mezi nejoblíbenější, hned po filmech založených na výjimečných archeologických objevech, patří archeologické dokumenty. Experimentální archeologie je v médiích prezentována zřídka. Pokud se občas objeví, potom se většinou jedná o živé přenosy z trhů a festivalů. O to překvapivější bylo, když TV Polska vyrobila několik seriálů založených na experimentální archeologii. Programy byly určeny především pro mládež, ale vzbudily zájem i mezi dospělými diváky. Seriály představily jednotlivé aktivity pravěkého člověka: získávání vody a potravy, výrobu a používání nástrojů, výrobu oděvů a stavbu obydlí. Jednotlivé procesy byly rekonstruovány a jejich detailní výklad byl spojen s představením moderních archeologických metod. Díky své popularitě byly tyto programy vydány ve formě výukových svazků, kde jsou filmy doplněny metodickou příručkou pro pedagogy. Završením úspěchu bylo jejich zařazení polským ministerstvem školství mezi doplňkové programy pro střední a vysoké školy.