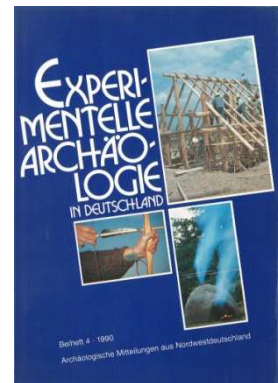


Experimentelle Archäologie in Deutschland Exhibition catalogue

R. P. Paardekooper for EXARC, February 2002

The first of all books in the series of the museum in Oldenburg is simply called "Experimentelle Archäologie in Deutschland" and appeared as Beiheft 4 in 1990. It contains 60 articles, collected and written while preparing the exhibition by the now called "Landesmuseum für Natur und Mensch" in Oldenburg, Northern Germany. The book is unfortunately no longer available. Apart from this book, in 1996, the texts to the exhibition appeared as separate volume. The 'new' catalogue of 1996 is only 25% of the volume of 1990 and with DEM 18,00 (about € 9,00) much more focused on the museum visitors.



Such a large quantity of articles is surprising and the volume seemed to appear out of the blue. But that is not entirely true. Experimental archaeology has a long tradition, but most articles are published in between traditional archaeological work, here and there in yearbooks and the like. Dr. Fansa made a great contribution in focussing these articles and people's attention to one book, to one exhibition. In the years after publication of this book, this focus was extended to the almost yearly conferences and its proceedings.

The editors wished to add as many different examples of experiments as possible into this volume. There was more than enough material available: most experiments do get published as a small article somewhere in this or that magazine, monographies on the subject are very seldom published. The effect of publishing 60 articles in less than 500 pages is that virtually no article is longer than 10 pages, some are less than five pages, just giving a little food for thought. The book is divided in 10 sections, excluding an introduction part with an article by the editor, *Dr. Fansa* as well as an article about exhibiting by *R. Ising*. The division is mostly based on the division of the exhibition material itself and might not reflect every interest of scientists into experimental archaeology. For that, it is best to purchase the complete series of 'Bilanz' books.

Bauen und Siedeln - building and settling
 Von der Aussaat bis zum Verzehr - from sowing to digestion
 Transport zu Wasser und zu Lande - transport on water and land
 Wieviel Aufwand für ein Grab? - How much effort for a grave?
 Steingeräte im Einsatz - stone tools in use
 Waffen erfinderischer Jäger - weapons of clever hunters
 Formen und Brennen - shaping and firing
 Bronzgießer und Eisenschmiede - bronze casters and iron smiths
 Leute machen Kleider - people make clothes
 Aus der Chemiewerkstatt der Antike - from the chemical workshop of Antiquity

The chapters with most attention are on agriculture and on textiles. Unfortunately, in later years, these subjects did not deliver so many presentations as in this book. This is even more regretting because most articles on these subjects in this volume represent well funded scientific experiments instead of experiments based on experience and know how. In later years, during the Tagung-series, the attention shifted between science, education and experimental activities. In general, this book contains more articles by archaeological educated individuals than of craftsmen. In the ideal experiment, you need both of those qualities. Some experiments described were already over ten years old, but clearly showed, an experiment is not something one 'does' in one single weekend. Good experiments either take a lot of time in themselves, or are because of their repeatability time consuming.

The wish to have experimental archaeology to be a natural science, the same wish as once expressed in archaeology itself, resounds in many experiments. It is not after ten years of Conferences and Proceedings, that that specific wish has been seen in its relative light. Archaeology - experimental archaeology as well - is a science, belonging to the "human sciences", in that lies its value, strength as well as its weaknesses. To say, experimental archaeology can only limit itself to the technical and functional aspects can only be justified by saying the same of archaeology. This will



make most people see, experimental archaeology reaches just as far as any other method in archaeology, all based on the same source material: artefacts and the information we derive from them, as well as our own imagination and abilities.

Truth is, experiments can falsify a specific hypothesis as well as show its provisional possibility. It can never prove anything, but that we have in common with all archaeologists and beyond. The imagination of the past is being reduced or enlarged to a more realistic image. More than in some other fields of archaeology, in experimental work there is the necessity for interdisciplinary work. This means, the archaeologist has to sacrifice his monopoly on the past, sometimes a painful procedure.

What is not made clear yet in these Proceedings (however the more in later books in this series) is the valuable feedback of experimental data to the archaeological information. Another development over the years is the shift from being focussed on a successful copy of an artefact towards being focussed on the process itself.

Fansa, M. (editor), Renken, B. , Döring, J. (coop.) (1990): Experimentelle Archäologie in Deutschland: Begleitschrift zu eine Ausstellung des Staatlichen Museums für Naturkunde und Vorgeschichte Oldenburg: Isensee, Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Nordwestdeutschland: Beiheft 4, (Oldenburg: Isensee), 480 pp, ISBN 3-920557-88-3 ISSN 0170-5776, (sold out).

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