A German "Leistungsschau": An Exhibition in Search of a European Image of History

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Bewegte Zeiten: Archäologie in Deutschland (Restless Times: Archaeology in Germany). Gropius Bau, Berlin, 21 September 2018–6 January 2019, curated by Matthias Wemhoff and Michael M. Rind.

Bewegte Zeiten: Archäologie in Deutschland, Begleitband zur Ausstellung im Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, edited by Matthias Wemhoff and Michael M. Rind for the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte der Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and the Verband der Landesarchäologen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Pp. 480, b&w figs. 29, color figs. 477. Michael Imhof, Petersberg 2018. €49.95. ISBN 978-3-7319-0723-7 (paper).

Restless Times: Archaeology in Germany centered on the idea that Europe is characterized by mobility. It explored transregional movements across great sweeps of time, from the Paleolithic to the recent past. The show took place at Gropius Bau, a preeminent Berlin exhibit hall named after the famous architect and founder of the Bauhaus (fig. 1). Curated by the Association of Federal State Archaeologists and the Berlin Museum for Prehistory and Early History, *Restless Times* displayed more than 1,000 objects from more than 300 find contexts. The exhibition highlighted the work of archaeologists active in the German Cultural Heritage Agency and museums. It presented extraordinary archaeological artifacts and finds from all over Germany, especially from the last 20 years, as well as selected older assemblages. Worthy of mention are the many finds from the Roman harbor in Cologne, the Nebra Sky Disk, finds from the Tollense valley battlefield, the earliest known spear, and the finds from the Hohle Fels cave in the Swabian Jura, including the Venus of Hohle Fels.

Developed by curators Matthias Wemhoff and Michael M. Rind, the exhibition was one of many events taking place as part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018: Sharing Heritage, the framework that led to state funding and support. Since 1983, the European Union has selected an annual cultural theme. In 2018, it supported initiatives and events across Europe that encouraged communities to engage with Europe's diverse cultural heritage.

Unlike two earlier major German archaeological exhibitions—namely *Das neue Bild der alten Welt* (*The New Impression of the Old World*), assembled at Cologne in 1975, and *Menschen, Zeiten, Räume* (*People, Periods, Places*) of

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FIG. 1. Gropius Bau, Berlin. On the street in front of the building are remains of the former Berlin Wall, and behind it are excavated remains of the headquarters of the Secret State Police (Gestapo), part of the open-air exhibition *Topography of Terror* (C. Ruggaber; © Berliner Festspiele).

2002 shown, like this exhibition, at Gropius Bau—the purpose of *Restless Times* was not to publicly announce newly found objects in Germany and interrogate their classification and contexts.[1] Rather, this important show examined transregional networks—the movements of peoples, things, and ideas along with the conflicts that such movements produce.

Guided by an overarching vision of "Europe networked," the curators arranged the exhibition thematically as opposed to chronologically, in four areas denoted Mobility, Exchange, Conflict, and Innovation. This bold concept is worth discussion. It promised to show that mobility and migration have been fundamental features of European history across time. But there are also potential pitfalls to this approach. Archaeological objects are historical sources, and their value extends beyond the illustration of the immediate themes in question. But how should this be done when the overarching organization is achronological, as here? Likewise, the main theme of "Europe networked" points to the curators' aim to create a "European picture of history" through archaeological objects, as they state in their introduction to the catalogue (16–19).[2] But the vast chronological scope of the show—from the Stone Age to present-day Germany—raises the question of the historicity of the very idea of "Europe."

The curators invested a great deal of effort into creating an impressive multimedia experience for visitors. However, the lingering impression is that the explanations of the numerous finds are not of the same quality as their multimedia staging, which comprised audio guides, films, and interactive computer displays. While the technology was impressive, it did not resolve the fundamental problems of the exhibition's ahistorical thematic arrangement.

But the exhibition did make other important contributions. As soon as one entered, an installation in the courtyard of Gropius Bau demonstrated to what extent archaeological regional authorities have benefited from extensive building projects in cities, as

[1] Borger 1975; Menghin and Planck 2002.

[2] Page numbers in parentheses refer to the related pages in the exhibition catalogue.

well as from road development and the construction of new railway tracks, electrical powerline grids, and pipelines—construction measures driven by German reunification. It was evident that the objects on display did not stem from planned research or investigation. Rather, archaeologists have had to react, mostly under time pressure, to conduct rescue archaeology, working in challenging conditions to expertly document sites and recover finds as construction proceeds. In this respect, the exhibition demonstrated the achievements of contemporary archaeology in Germany.

Furthermore, the comprehensive catalogue is of very high quality. It is structured thematically, a reflection of walking through the exhibition, right down to sections and find complexes. Finds, objects, works of art, and, where possible, assemblages are examined in detail by relevant experts. The volume is fittingly illustrated with abundant photographs and is rounded off with a comprehensive bibliography. It provides a sweeping vision of human mobility across time that bears much fruit.

NETWORKED . . . EUROPE?

The exhibition began in the foyer of Gropius Bau. The visitor was, on welcome, faced with an impressive setting that presented artifacts from Cologne that reveal the vast transregional networks of the Roman empire (23–43). In 2007, the construction of a new underground rail line in Cologne cut through a sand-silted Roman harbor basin. Numerous artifacts from everyday life were unearthed. Remains of the wharf's wooden retaining wall served as the installation's background. The finds were spread out in the room, functioning as testimonies of daily life of the sort that differed greatly from other provinces in the Roman empire. This included wooden planks, stone sculptures, funerary reliefs, metal objects, ceramic vessels, and vast numbers of amphoras (fig. 2). Numerous trade articles were transported on the Rhine River and through the harbor to Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium—whence "Cologne"—the subsequent capital city of Germania Inferior. Ships belonging to the Rhine fleet were also docked near the *limes*.

The opening display demonstrated that the artifacts belong in a superordinate, even empire-wide, context, since the Imperium Romanum encompassed not only parts of Europe but also the Mediterranean and sometimes even Mesopotamia. The exploration of old Cologne, as an important city in the highly developed Roman empire, must appropriately be understood from a supraregional historical perspective. External influences brought about major social and economic changes. The term "romanization" often used to explain this process, though vague, does serve to describe the relationship of Rome and its provinces, which politically, institutionally, and socially, as well as religiously, culturally, and linguistically, belonged to the empire. Although conquest initially established Rome's relationship to the provinces, the Imperium Romanum proved to be surprisingly stable. This was due to the many ways in which the empire regulated mobility, exchange, internal and external conflicts, and innovations in the broadest sense. This portion of the exhibition explored Cologne's place within this larger historical and transregional network.

MOBILITY

Archaeology in Germany frequently reveals traces of mobility since paths, trails, roads, and river bridges have left their marks. Archaeological remains from different periods and locations attest to various forms of human movement over the centuries. Already by the Early Neolithic period—namely, before the invention of the wheel—paths through difficult terrain had been paved and made passable, and bodies of water were bridged. A multidimensional timeline on the exhibition's walls informed the visitor that such roads range from prehistoric 6,000-year-old country roads to modern transport systems. Roman milestones, further evidence of an empire-wide road network, indicated distances between destinations in the entire Imperium Romanum. The exhibition also included medieval roads—paved with fascines and gravel—as well as concrete slabs from a former DDR patrol road in what were called the Berlin Wall's "death strip," with accompanying "Stalin lawns," which were reinforced steel mat constructions whose "blades of steel grass" pointed upward. The latter are evidence of violent and forced immobility, since they were intended to prevent uncontrolled movement between East and West Germany.

EXCHANGE

The extensive topic of "exchange" was given its own space. Here, examination of archaeological objects and the rapidly evolving field of archaeology and genetics have much to contribute. The exhibition showed that the four Neolithic migrations identified to date shaped

FIG. 2. Exhibition entrance area with the finds from the Roman harbor in Cologne (D. von Becker; © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte).

the whole of Central Europe; these can be scientifically linked to the distribution and exchange of characteristic artifacts (73–77). Thanks to new scientific methods, skeletal remains provide genetic evidence for human migration. The analysis of the genome has illuminated changes that took place during the Neolithic transition. The display highlighted this recent paleogenetic research. In 2014, a team directed by Svante Pääbo from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig successfully unlocked almost the entire Neanderthal genome.[3] As a result, a comparison with the genomes of humans today became possible and, in the framework of paleogenetics, systematic gene research is being conducted to gain information about prehistoric human populations and their migratory behaviors.

The exhibition showed that paleogenetic research has developed enormously in the last decade and promises new perspectives on human migrations. But the interpretation of this research is controversial and poses a broad challenge: how does one communicate discoveries about ancient DNA to the public, especially when the discoveries are complicated, politically controversial, and rapidly changing?[4] The exhibition presented the story of human migrations but left aside any discussion of these controversies or challenges. It would have benefited from this discussion being included, especially in Germany where archaeological-historical research remains burdened by the shadow of the Third Reich's racial ideology.

Along with human migration, the exhibition addressed the exchange and flow of goods, including the extraction of raw materials, manufacture of products, distribution, and trade, as well as the resulting social changes. Artifacts from several periods—such as Neolithic stone axes made of jadeite or flint, Bronze Age bronze axes, and the popular semiprecious gemstone

[3] Pääbo 2015.

[4] The recent controversy over the work of geneticist David Reich (2018) reveals the explosive power of this research.

almandine from the migration period—exemplified trade routes and how they changed over time. Also displayed were the 82 gold spirals from the Gessel hoard find in Lower Saxony, which was discovered during the construction of a pipeline in 2011 (159–63). These finds bear witness to extensive supraregional trade relations along with differentiated consumer behavior and the existence of elevated social statuses.

The transregional exchange of merchandise over long distances resulted in trade networks linking areas rich in raw materials with those lacking in natural resources. In addition to raw materials and basic commodities, coveted luxury goods were exported. As a result, long distances were overcome, and numerous archaeological signs of imported goods can be found in locations along trade routes, especially major ones such as the Amber and Silk Roads. Political power stemmed not only from controlling trade and traffic routes but also from the ownership of natural resources. Yet, the extent of this control was shaped quite differently depending on the historical period and social context.

CONFLICT

Political developments in various regions of Europe are determined to this day by ethnic tensions and armed conflicts. These hamper archaeological research. Archaeological results, furthermore, can be used as arguments in political controversy. In the wake of the epochal upheaval with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the preservation of historical monuments has become a central theme of archaeological work in Germany. This development has gone hand in hand with the use of new methods that greatly facilitate the documentation of even larger sites, such as entire battlegrounds. But, despite its archaeological importance, the theme of conflict and heritage was one of the conceptually weakest in the exhibition. The exhibition could have raised and perhaps even answered many fundamental questions about modern archaeology's ties to historical-political conditions. But the exhibition's disregard of temporal connections and developments creates the impression that "conflict" is only a shop window where current finds are shown.

For example, cannons and other objects from a maritime find related to a sea battle in the Baltic Sea near the island of Fehmarn during the Great Northern War (1700–1721) were shown in one room (295–307). Next to that, an installation presented the Tollense valley battlefield (271–81), the earliest attestable battlefield in the history of Central Europe in which Neolithic soldiers fought by the river Tollense near Neubrandenburg in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern around 1250 B.C.E. In 1996, human skeletal remains were inadvertently discovered in the Tollense valley, which led to excavations that have continued to the present day. According to preliminary projections, the bone and skull remains and the remnants of weapons suggest that the battle could have involved up to 6,000 warriors (online fig. 1).[5] The exhibition continued with the Battle at the Harzhorn in Lower Saxony (283–93). Here, an installation containing numerous Roman weapons (such as catapult projectiles, arrows, and lance tips), horse accessories, tools, and coins gave an idea of fighting conditions between Germanic troops and Roman legionaries. Besides Kalkriese (the probable site of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest), this is possibly the best preserved and researched Imperial-age Roman battlefield in Europe. The far-reaching advances of Roman troops in the Germanic war of 235/36 C.E. are documented in written sources, yet the discovery of the complex at Harzhorn was sensational. This is due to the fact that the battle, in which the Roman legionaries were ambushed, was so far from the *limes*.

Under the theme of conflict, an exhibition subsection called "Bildersturm" (Iconoclasm) was dedicated to violence against objects. While small, this section highlighted problems in the exhibition's disregard of historical-political contexts. An example from the Roman Imperial period was on display: the magnificent gilded horse head of an Augustan bronze equestrian statue found in a well near Waldgirmes (Hesse) (fig. 3). The Roman settlement was no mere trading post; five splendid equestrian statues were erected before the site was finally destroyed by enemies. The numerous bronze fragment finds—often small and scattered widely—suggest that the statues were destroyed because they represented the Roman enemy, probably shortly after the Roman defeat at Teutoburg (9 B.C.E.). But one can hardly speak of an isolated case of iconoclasm, since the violence visited upon the statues would probably have been mirrored in the destruction of all the settlements (328–31).[6]

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[5] See AJA Online, www.ajaonline.org, for online-only figures accompanying this article.

[6] Rasbach 2017.

FIG. 3. Horse head from an equestrian statue, bronze and gold, late first century B.C.E.–early first century C.E., over-life-sized, from Waldgirmes (Hesse). Bad Homburg, Römerkastell Saalburg (P. Odvody; © Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Hessen).

Further examples of iconoclasm include remains from the 11th-century synagogue built in the Jewish quarter of Cologne and destroyed in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1349, as well as figures of saints from Muenster demolished in the city's cathedral by Anabaptists in 1534 and subsequently used to fortify the ramparts. Such objects were grouped with an impressive 2011 find from Berlin of 16 sculptures made by less well known artists who were discredited by the Third Reich (online fig. 2). These pieces once stood in German museums, but they were labeled "degenerate art" by the Nazi Party and confiscated in 1937. After seizure, they were stored in a residential building close to the mayoral seat, the Red Town Hall (Rotes Rathaus), which was destroyed by bombing in 1944.

Taken together, the objects reinforced the uneven sense of the content on view. The visitor might wonder what the artifacts are supposed to illustrate. Different motives led to the violence against these images (e.g., the destruction of Roman settlements by local inhabitants, the religious hate in the pogrom of Cologne, the bigoted loathing of images by the Anabaptists in Muenster, and the Nazis' ideologically governed assessment of art). Such motives can, at best, only be indirectly linked to the phenomenon of iconoclasm (324–27). The content raises questions about inclusion: why did the exhibition not, for instance, examine archaeological activities historically linked to German dictators? This could have included excavations of former concentration camps and other terrorizing institutions of the Nazi regime, as well as those from the later Soviet camps such as Special Camp No. 9 at Fuenfeichen near Neubrandenburg. These topics could certainly have been grouped under "conflicts," an area of research important in German archaeology, especially since 1989. Realities, precisely here, can contribute to clarifying history.[7]

INNOVATION

The last section was devoted to innovation, a phenomenon seen in both technical and intellectual terms. It is common knowledge that the spirit of discovery has always driven people to solve problems and that new ideas circulate and change societies. Against this background, the problems of an achronological exhibition concept are plain to see. First, the exhibition designers placed Paleolithic artifacts, such as the 6 cm high figure of Venus of Hohle Fels—made of mammoth ivory and probably the oldest known portrayal of a woman—together with other artifacts found in the caves of the Swabian Jura (online fig. 3). A model of the Carolingian Imperial Palace, Ingelheim, stood by a repurposed Roman capital. A reconstructed Roman death bed from Haltern am See (North Rhine-Westphalia) (online fig. 4) followed photographs, plans, and finds from the Staufian Holsterburg in Westphalia (410–11). An alchemist's workshop from the early modern period, excavated in the Wittenberg, showed how the "Philosopher's stone" was sought (419–31). Nearby, sections of a reconstructed Mithraeum from Gueglingen were displayed in a niche (365–66) and attested to widespread belief in the sacred mysteries during the Roman Imperial period. The seeming randomness of the exhibition's design is reminiscent of the sort of jumble found at any garden-variety German

[7] Bernbeck 2017.

museum of local history (Heimatmuseum); each object loses its intrinsic value when torn from its context thus reducing its historical-archaeological significance.

A gallery dedicated to "Technical Innovations" continued to put the visitors' associative abilities to the test. A large machine designed to generate warm air, which was installed in the cellar of the Berlin Palace in the 19th century (416–17), was placed opposite the oldest throwing weapon known—the sensational spear from Schoeningen (Lower Saxony), which was used for hunting over 300,000 years ago (401) (fig. 4).

The final room outshone everything before it. But this room, which was strikingly limited in terms of content and form, was only loosely connected to the exhibition's main themes. The small room was focused on innovations related to time and space—in other words, those pertaining to the calendar, the seasons, and the constellations. The Nebra Sky Disk (ca. 1600 B.C.E.), the central element in the room, sat opposite three gold hats from Berlin, Schifferstadt, and Aventon that may have astronomical associations (351–59) (fig. 5; online fig. 5). This combination has never before been seen in a German museum. "Space and Time" was the label used for the room, but it could just have easily been something as general as "The Universe, Earth, and Humans."

Stars were a source of orientation for prehistoric humans, and, over time, observations of the firmament became ever more detailed. Astronomical studies, especially regarding the lengths of lunar and solar years, led to the invention of the calendar. The Nebra Sky Disk remains a unique specimen; researchers continue to discuss the workmanship and meaning of its gold applications. It was found by illegal metal detectorists on the Mittelberg near Nebra (Saxony-Anhalt) in 1999 and is the highlight of the State Museum of Saxony-Anhalt in Halle.[8] But it is by no means the only known Bronze Age calendar. The somewhat later three gold hats (1300–1000 B.C.E.) are also said to have served as calendars due to their signs and their arrangement, though this is controversial.

EVIDENCE OF PROVENANCE

Needless to say, the question of provenance in an archaeology exhibition is of great importance. Most objects were found, excavated, or recovered by appropriate authorities. However, several exceedingly significant artifacts were unearthed by illegal treasure hunters, mostly detectorists. These found their way to the proper authority via judicial proceedings. One need only think of the Nebra Sky Disk, and also relevant is the Late Antique Ruelzheim Treasure, discovered along the road from Mainz to Strasbourg in 2013. The illegal detectorist who found it was prosecuted, during which time this highly significant find entered the museum in Speyer. The treasure was buried in the fifth century C.E. and is possibly of East Germanic Hun origin, perhaps even from the environs of Hun ruler Attila. Also, the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of the Berlin Gold Hat from the art market in 1996 by the Berlin Museum for Prehistory and Early History are rather peculiar. The origins of the find are unknown, and so it may potentially be considered loot. However, the Berlin museum argues that—under the ethics rules of the International Council of Museums—the acquisition of pieces without provenance is allowed for as a "repository of last resort" so that important pieces do not disappear into dark channels.[9]

WHAT IS MISSING AND WHAT IS THE EXHIBITION'S MAIN MESSAGE?

When leaving an exhibition, the visitor often may think: what was missing? Certainly, there is little scientific exchange with archaeological research from eastern Central Europe, which has been strengthened since the political upheavals of 1989 and 1990. Therefore, there was a rather palpable deficit in the exhibition since it only marginally dealt with eastern European regions. Oddly, though focused on Germany, not a single example of Slavic archaeology was present in the exhibition. The topic of the western Slavs should have been broached, especially considering the density of finds.

The Berlin museum responsible for the exhibition emerged from a specific collection devoted to Germanic-Slavic antiquities, which was housed, from 1829, at the Monbijou Palace as the Museum for National Antiquities. Berlin was therefore one of the few places in Germany, aside from Goerlitz, where early Slavic research was conducted. Why then were there no Slavic exhibits if the Slavs, after all, along with the Celts and Germanic peoples, belong in the historical sense to "ancient European cultures"? But here we come across a fundamental problem with the

[8] Meller 2004.

[9] Timm and Zimmermann 2014.

FIG. 4. View of "Technical Innovations and Established Inventions" gallery. On the left, the rotor of a hot-air heating system from about 1904 in the Berlin City Palace (D. von Becker; © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte).

FIG. 5. Nebra Sky Disk, bronze and gold, ca. 1600 B.C.E., diam. ca. 32 cm, from Nebra (Saxony-Anhalt). Halle, Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt (J. Lipták; © Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt).

exhibition: how could European cultures exist before Europe itself? This is a key question for an exhibition in which material dates back to the Stone Age. Equally, territorial Europe is not clearly defined; conceivably it fits with current political European Union terminology.

In principle, the significance of the exhibition's didactic potpourri is clear: everything is related to the development of human history. This basic idea was obscured, however, by the fact that all objects shown, with few exceptions, were excavated or discovered in Germany. Additionally, older finds originate from areas formerly belonging to Germany.

Essentially, the thematic and transhistorical order of the exhibition was at odds with the materiality of the objects: historicity and time-spanning themes fight it out. What then, are possible advantages to ordering material achronologically, if any? Can the deep history of things be explored in this way and can objects be fitted into their social and political contexts? If the visitor is to be guided along in archaeological exhibitions, then didactic concepts must be chosen that do justice to the archaeological material.

Ultimately, we must address the key issue: what does this archaeological exhibition have to say about European or German identities? First, we should recognize that the complex and much-discussed question of European identity is not one that should be limited to the geographical scope of the European Union alone. More than just geography is at play.

Let us consider the German experience. On the basis of the historical experience of National Socialism, the Federal Republic of Germany adopted a constitution in 1949, known formally as the Basic Law. Its preamble states that the "German People" are "inspired" by the purpose "of serving the peace of the world as an equal member in a united Europe." European integration thus stands as one of the stated goals of the German state to this day.

In the exhibition, political objectives influence scientific-archaeological questions. State institutions, as well as federal and state officials, financed and organized *Restless Times*. The exhibition presented new archaeological discoveries through a particular political-ideological lens. The overarching story of recent archaeological discoveries in Germany is one of contemporary European and German identities.[10]

The diverse range of objects on display in Berlin from prehistoric cultures as well as from Roman, Medieval, and modern epochs did, in fact, raise questions about European identity. However, it is essential not to forget that such identities are themselves only relatively recent historical and social constructs, which emerged in the 18th century and in particular in the wake of the French Revolution. Such national and European identities still, in effect, are in place today, and it is through their social-political perspective that the viewer was asked to view the exhibition and the reader will read its associated volume.

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[10] Eggert 2006.

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