

EDITED BY

FRANCESCO
MENOTTI

AIDAN
O'SULLIVAN



≡ The Oxford Handbook of
WETLAND
ARCHAEOLOGY

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DB,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
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First Edition published in 2013

Impression: 1

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

ISBN 978-0-19-957349-3

Printed in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

CHAPTER 51

MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS, OPEN-AIR MUSEUMS, AND HANDS-ON ARCHAEOLOGY

GUNTER SCHÖBEL

INTRODUCTION

It was a sensational event, when in 1973 John Coles presented the analysis of the stomach contents of a bog body—Tollund Man—from Denmark. The public was amazed that British archaeologists, in an experiment and in participation with the BBC, replicated the food remains found in the bog body's stomach. The meal apparently had only been edible by washing it down with a generous swallow of whisky (Coles 1973: 47). Just as spectacular was the experiment presented in 1899 by the Swiss anatomist Kollmann from Basel, who had cast the fingertips from a Neolithic human found at the pile dwellings of Corcelettes at Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland. Their impressions had been left in the still-moist bottom of a clay pot. The scientific discussion inferred that these fingertips must have belonged to a delicate hand, presumably of a woman or a child, and, judging from the imprints, the fingernails had been reasonably well trimmed (Leuzinger and Schöbel 2004: 60).

These kinds of exciting stories have been repeated, and not only from the justly famous prehistoric pile dwellings of the Circum-Alpine region. There is, for example, Ötzi, the Ice Man found near Hauslabjoch in the Ötztal Alps. There are the Bronze Age ships of Dover and Salcombe; the oldest trackways made of wooden planks in England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, and elsewhere; and last but not least the wooden wheels from the Upper Swabian bogs in Southern Germany. During its 200 years of history, wetland archaeology has also contributed greatly to developments in science. It played a great role in the development of pollen analysis, dendrochronology, aerial photography, and underwater archaeology, as well as in archaeometry, an interdisciplinary approach oriented towards the application of natural scientific methods. These new methods, their findings, and above all the new interpretations enabled by them have inspired the arts, politics, pedagogy, the media, and museum founders to utilize these unique results in their presentations by introducing them to the public.

Because of the wealth of finds and information, 'wetlands' and their highlights such as the pile dwellings and the bog settlements have become the centre of public interest in Europe since the nineteenth century (cf. contributions by Leuzinger, Chapter 50, and Kaeser, Chapter 49 this volume). Still today, wetland finds attract extraordinary interest. Germany, Latvia, Denmark, and Switzerland were, and still are, very proud to own such valuable historical archives. Indeed, they are proud to a degree that they have called the pile dwellings in the Alpine region and neighbouring countries the 'Pyramids of Switzerland', and from the earliest research, accounts and summaries of European history have been written in English, French, and German (Keller 1866; Munro 1908). In the 19th century, pile dwellings were topics of discussion at several international conferences (Schöbel 2004a). However, during the 20th century they became more a matter of regional interest (although this is still open to discussion).

In 2004, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of pile-dwelling discovery and research in Europe, several papers were published (Antiquarische Gesellschaft Zürich 2004; Dixon 2004; Liabeuf and Gachet 2006; Leuzinger and Schöbel 2004; Rückert 2004; Schöbel 2004a) that provided an overview of the reasonably current status in research. In the spring of 2010 Switzerland, together with five other countries—France, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, and Italy—submitted a selection of ancient pile dwellings in and around the Alpine region for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage list, and this application has recently been successful. Currently, pile-dwelling finds are displayed as evidence of early European cultures in almost all archives of renowned museums from Paris to London, St Petersburg to Vienna. But meanwhile also the USA, China, and Cambodia often feature wetland excavation finds amongst exhibitions on recent discoveries. Worldwide, this is a newly developing sector in the museums field. The first publicly available list of museums includes 210 institutions with historically important collections, of which 55 are archaeological open-air museums. Among those are the Swiss National Museum, Zurich (Landesmuseum Zürich), the Natural History Museum, Vienna (Naturhistorisches Museum Wien), the Rosgarten-Museum Konstanz in Germany, the Museum Mondsee in Austria, the Museo Parco delle palafitte di Fiafé in Italy, and the Narodni muzej in Ljubljana, Slovenia.¹ Emphasis is given to the presentation of wetland finds of the Stone and Bronze Age between 5000 and 700 BC. In the British Isles, wetland finds are known from crannogs and lake-dwellings dating from the Bronze Age, through the Middle Ages and up to modern times (O'Sullivan 1998; 2000; see also Henderson and Sands, Chapter 16 this volume). In Northern Europe, we find Viking settlements from around 1000 AD.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF WETLAND MUSEUMS

The core of most exhibits from wetlands is formed by private collections. Artefacts accidentally found during peat cutting or digging draining channels, or through methodical collection from lake floors, prompted the founding of the first museums during the 19th century. In Ireland, for example, Sir William Wilde and William G. Wood-Martin reported on 220

¹ A complete list of museums can be viewed at www.pfahlbauten.de/museen.

crannogs between 1839 and 1886. The finds of these excavation sites became the basis for the Royal Irish Academy exhibition that was ultimately to form the core of the collections of the National Museum of Ireland (O'Sullivan 1998; 2000: 6). Preserved exhibitions of private collectors, such as the German Colonel Schwab in Biel 1873 or the pharmacist Ludwig Leiner in Konstanz 1871, still today present a sense of the early phase of museum displays (Schöbel 1997: 115). These finds not only decorated prehistoric sections of aristocratic collections, but also became an expression of publically supported exhibits (cf. Kaeser, Chapter 49 this volume). Furthermore, not only the Imperial Natural History Museum in Vienna but also civil antiquarian societies like those in Zurich under the leadership of Ferdinand Keller exhibited finds from lake-dwellings. Natural-history cabinets contained remains of animals, plants, woods, and textiles from ancient times before advanced civilizations. They reported the latest scientific findings in zoology, botany, geology, and material analysis. These were universal presentations fitting the trends of the 19th century.

OPEN-AIR MUSEUMS IN EUROPE

The development of archaeological open-air museums cannot be separated from the genesis of folkloristic open-air museums or the development in indoor museums. The scientific bases were the same. However, they always differed in their form of presentation, in the museological methods applied, and in their style of dialogue with the visitor. The reasons for this were the locations of the museum, which were situated either in the countryside, close to the excavation sites, or in the residential districts of metropolitan areas. The museum in the countryside and the museum in the metropolitan area each attracted an audience with distinct motivations: conveying information out of doors and presenting information inside historical buildings constitute two forms of communication.

Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, concepts are required that correspond with modern learning. These are formed more by the needs of individual target groups and less by the design visions of the curators. The multiplicity of cultural materials, together with a multifaceted public awareness, demand a range of diversified offerings. Museums with traditional concepts are affected by this trend. Open-air museums, on the other hand, are booming. As new and successful educational establishments, they demonstrate changes in the reception of history, fulfilling society's need for new ways of dealing with the visitor (Black 2008; Hooper-Greenhill 2007; Korff 2007; Lord 2007; Zipsane 2008). By open-air exhibitions, through 'hands-on' approaches, with their relationships with nature and their wider spectrum of methods, they reach the audience more directly and effectively than traditional museum designs.

In recent years a continuous boom in the building of archaeological open-air museums can be observed throughout Europe. The museums guide introduced in 2009 by the EU Directorate-General for Education and Culture in connection with the project liveArch counted no fewer than 212 institutions (Fig. 51.1) (Pelillo 2009) in Europe. More than 100 of these institutions have emerged in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria (Schöbel 2008: 95, fig.1). Some of these (of which a selection is introduced here) focus on wetland settlements: Denmark (Lejre Sagnland; Vinderup Hjerl Hede), Germany (Bad Buchau Federseemuseum; Uhlhingen-Mühlhofen Pfahlbaumuseum), Great Britain (Glastonbury Peat Moor Centre; Peterborough

