

TEA

The European Archaeologist

The newsletter of EAA members for EAA members
Issue 64 – Spring 2020

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Published by the European Association of Archaeologists, c/o Institute of Archaeology CAS, Letenská 4, 11801 Praha 1, Czech Republic

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Report on the 25th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA), Bern (Switzerland), 4-7 September 2019

by Albert Hafner & Amelie Alterauge, Institute of Archaeological Sciences, University of Bern

The 25th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) was held in Bern (Switzerland) from 4-7 September 2019. The EAA Annual Meeting has become the largest conference on archaeology and heritage management in Europe, hosted every year in a different city/country. 2019 was the 25th anniversary of the Association, and as the current EAA President Felipe Criado-Boado has put it: The occasion represents the unique opportunity to evaluate what has been the contribution of the EAA to archaeology, archaeological heritage but also society throughout its 25 years history, not only with regard to developments in the field, but also with regard to prospects and challenges for the future.¹

In 2014, the University of Bern under the lead of Prof. Dr. Albert Hafner from the Institute of Archaeological Sciences, with the support of the Federal Office of Culture and the City of Bern, as well as other Swiss archaeological and historical institutions drew up a proposal to organise the 2019 Annual Meeting. The candidature was accepted and presented at the EAA Annual Meeting in Vilnius in 2016.

The Meeting was scheduled to take place between 4 and 7 September 2019 at the facilities of the University of Bern (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: University of Bern Main Building (photo: K. Kleinová)

Personnel, organisation and location

A congress of this type and size requires a huge organisational effort, which started primarily in September 2017, following the EAA Annual Meeting in Maastricht. The organisation of an event of this calibre would be unachievable for a university administration without a specialised staff or the capacity of reaction essential to this undertaking.

However, the main concern of the local organisers was the uncertain financial situation of the conference, both regarding the number of attendees to be expected as well as the financial support from Swiss organisations. Therefore, it was regarded



Figure 2: Local organising team (from left to right): Corinne Stäheli, Albert Hafner, Amelie Alterauge, Barbara Gerber

¹ Felipe Criado-Boado/Sophie Hüglin, 25 years of EAA from academic platform to social responsibility. *Archäologie Schweiz* 42(3), 2019, 4-15.

too risky to hire a private conference organisation office, but instead the local organising team (Fig. 2) formed around Prof. Dr. Albert Hafner, supported by university assistant Amelie Alterauge. At a later stage, the team was completed with student assistant Corinne Stäheli, graphic designer Susanna Kaufmann and consultant Dr. Barbara Gerber. This task force turned out advantageous and effective since the workflow at the University often required internal insights or authorizations.

In parallel, the EAA secretariat in Prague was very much involved in the organisation of the Annual Meeting. The secretariat, in person of Sylvie Květinová, Kateřina Kleinová and Krisztína Pavlíčková, was responsible for the EAA website, registration, membership applications and proposals for sessions and papers. Due to their continuous and profound engagement, continuity to the experience, stability in the organisational design, and a control over the financial aspects of the event were provided to the Meeting in Bern.

In the recent years, the European Archaeological Fair (EAF) became a relevant and constant part of the Annual Meeting, offering various institutions, publishers and companies the opportunity to present themselves and their products and to come into contact with potential clients/members. The organisation of the EAF was put into the qualified hands of the private company ArchaeoConcept, represented by Dr. Cynthia Dunning and her team, who were also delegated with the planning of the excursions.

The realization of the Meeting would not have been possible without the support of 41 international volunteers (Fig. 3) who assisted the organisers in various tasks, such as set-up of the logistics, registration of delegates and session monitoring. Those volunteers have been selected from 150 applicants for whom volunteering is financially often the only way to take part in such a conference. The benefits, such as accommodation or transport, catering, free registration and membership, were a reward for the hard work of the volunteers; on top of it, participating in such an event, some even with a poster contribution, will contribute positively to their CV. We are convinced that these young researchers who represent the future of the profession will establish a connection with the Association and its goals.

The University of Bern generously provided the premises for the conference, which included the University main building, the UniS building and the area at the Grosse Schanze in front of the university. A huge tent was erected at this place where the coffee breaks were served. The session rooms were distributed among the two university buildings, and posters were presented in the corridors. The registration and help desk were located in the foyer of the main building, while the EAF took place in the Kuppelraum at the 5th floor as well as in the subjacent foyer (Fig. 4).



Figure 3: Meeting with EAA 2019 volunteers and EAA President (photo: K. Kleinová)



Figure 4: EAF Fair at the Kuppelraum (photo: K. Kleinová)

The EAF 2019 comprised 28 stands from publishers, institutions and private companies and were accompanied by cozy seating areas. The facilities were in close proximity to each other, and the delegates also benefited from the vicinity of Bern main station.

Scientific programme

It has become a tradition in recent years that the scientific programme of the EAA Annual Meetings focuses on six key themes. These were determined in an intensive process, initiated by the organisers of the Meeting and in further exchange with the Executive Board of the EAA and the Scientific Committee. The Scientific Committee consisted of Swiss researchers, previous EAA conference organisers and members of the EAA Executive Board.

The 25th Annual Meeting themes incorporated the diversity of EAA and the multidimensionality of archaeological research and practice, including interpretation of the past, heritage management and politics. The selected themes reflected in a certain way classical fields of archaeological research and practice, but also current trends and supra-regional aspects. The six thematic fields formed the framework for the submission of sessions by EAA members. The first two themes "Archaeological theory and methods beyond paradigms" and "Interpreting the archaeological record: artefacts, humans, and landscapes" aimed to cover a variety of topics related to the practice and interpretation of past material culture. At the same time, the first theme also alluded to the motto of the annual conference: "Beyond paradigms". From Bern, the mountains of the Bernese Alps are within close reach, and mountains determine the identity of Switzerland's inhabitants. It was therefore obvious to choose the theme "Archaeology of mountainous landscapes", embracing not only the archaeology of the Central European Alps, but all European and non-European mountain landscapes. With the fourth topic "Digital archaeology, science and multidisciplinary: new methods, new challenges", we intended to offer opportunities for a professional exchange on one of the current focal points in archaeological research and practice. Digital Archaeology is an opportunity and a challenge in one and we are in the middle of a process that will radically change much of the well-known. This also applies to the theme "Archaeological heritage and museum management: future chances, future risks". The preservation of archaeological heritage and the sustainable management of archaeological resources is of fundamental importance for future generations. With the sixth topic, "Global change and archaeology", we wanted to initiate discussions dedicated to the ongoing global change and its impact on the atmosphere, biosphere and human society.

Between 24 September and 12 November 2018, session proposals could be submitted for the Bern Annual Meeting related to the themes mentioned above. It was mandatory that the session organisers came from at least two different countries in order to enable transnational and transversal scientific exchange. The Scientific Committee met on 28 November 2018 in Bern to decide on the more than 180 submitted session proposals (Fig. 5).

Each proposal was evaluated by several Scientific Committee members and discussed in the plenary. Nearly identical proposals as well as accepted proposals, which however did not find enough contributions, were merged. At the end, 166 sessions took place during the Annual Meeting, among them not only regular sessions, but also discussion sessions, round tables with invited speakers and workshops. Up to 31 sessions were running parallel at the same time. Overall, the Scientific Committee was very pleased with the diverse and high-quality proposals of sessions from EAA members.



Figure 5: Meeting of the Scientific Committee in Bern (photo: K. Kleinová)

Contribution submissions were collected from 19 December 2018 until 18 February 2019; they were evaluated and arranged in order by the session organisers with input from the EAA Secretariat to avoid any overlaps in the programme. Together with the local organisers, they opted for a periodically and thematically balanced schedule, covering the entire three days of the scientific programme. Many communities used the time prior to the conference or the free time slots for meetings with their members. Various EAA specific committees, including the Executive Board and the Nomination Committee, also took advantage of the occasion to meet. Besides, EAA Officers met with corporate members, volunteers and the organisers of past and coming EAA Annual Meetings.

In total, 1634 contributions, among them 104 posters, were made at the Meeting. Sessions ran from 8:30 to 18:30 on Thursday (5 September) and Saturday (7 September) and from 8:30 to 16:00 on Friday (6 September). The different parallel sessions were structured around 15 minute papers and discussion slots, with a required minimum of 6 and a maximum of 22 papers. They were organised into two-hour blocks separated by breaks, during which the delegates were offered coffee and snacks, and lunch for those who ordered it. On Friday, the spare time slot was used to hold the Annual Membership Business Meeting (AMBM) where matters of the Association, such as the election of EAA representatives and the location of future Meetings, were discussed.

Delegates came from 75 different countries; about one third of the delegates came from an institution in the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, Italy, followed by the United States, France and Switzerland. Due to the high living expenses in Switzerland, delegates from Eastern and Southern European countries were underrepresented in comparison to previous years, but the EAA tried to overcome this inhibiting factor by granting 106 travel grants à 400 EUR to eligible researchers. The travel grants were offered jointly by the Oscar Montelius Foundation (OMF) and the Annual Meeting organisers.

Scientific keynote presentations are an important element of the EAA Annual Meeting. These are the only moments in the thematic session-oriented conference where broader topics can be presented to a wider audience. The list of proposals included more than 40 speakers and the Scientific Committee struggled to make its selection. We have tried to make a gender, career and regionally balanced selection and hoped to provide a stimulating and interesting programme contribution.

Six keynote lectures were devoted to the different themes of the conference, incorporating the diversity and multidimensionality of archaeological research and heritage management. Alison Sheridan reflected on constructing narratives of Britain's and whole Europe's prehistoric past while dealing with the challenges of new data, contested discourses and a febrile political climate. Karin M. Frei discussed how to move from multi- or cross disciplinary studies to more transdisciplinary approaches between archaeology and natural sciences. Gavin Lucas considered the nature of archaeological theory in a post-paradigm era and reflected on the function of creativity in archaeological interpretation. Kerstin Hofmann demonstrated the potential of translation theories by applying them to archaeological themes and practices, including transdisciplinarity and resilience as a travelling concept, object-epistemological practices of editing things, and translation as a concept for the analysis of cultural contacts. Francesco Carrer explored some of the recent advancements of mountain archaeology and showed how they are transforming the perception of mountain landscapes, their history and their future management. Innocent Pikirayi examined aspects of ancient socio-political complexity, human-environment interactions, and collapse and, possibly regeneration of some societies in Africa in order to situate the discipline of archaeology towards global change in the present. Two additional keynote lectures were meant to strengthen the links between the host and partner organisations. Danilyn Rutherford from the Wenner-Gren Foundation probed the definitions and aims of archaeology and anthropology and boiled them down to inquiry vs. engagement. Clive Ruggles represented the SEAC community with his lecture on archaeoastronomy during which he showed not only tangible links between the material record and observable phenomena in the sky, but also public incentives to preserve associated practices. The

European Society for Astronomy in Culture (SEAC) held their Annual Meeting parallel to the EAA conference and were with about 60 members well represented.

Social Programme

On Wednesday 4 September 2019, the first official appointment in the conference agenda was the President's Lunch at the Alpine Museum in Bern. EAA President Felipe Criado-Boado invited the representatives of akin archaeological organisations, EAA corporate members, working communities and conference organisers to a lunch meeting where organisational approaches to gender equality in archaeology were discussed. EAA suggested discussing, from the perspective of all organisations, what still stands in the way of establishing gender equality in archaeology, and tackle behaviour classified as gender discrimination and sexual harassment.²

The Annual Meeting was officially opened with the Opening Ceremony held at the French church on 4 September at 5 pm. The former monastery church was built in the 13th century by the Dominicans who had lived in Bern since 1269. Until today, the church is used by the French-speaking Reformed community from which its current name derives. Around 450 delegates came to listen to the welcoming words of Bern's mayor Alec von Graffenried (Fig. 6), the rector of the university Christian Leumann and the main organiser Albert Hafner. All three emphasized the great honor for Bern and the University to host the 25th anniversary EAA Annual Meeting, which at the same time represents the largest conference the University has ever hosted in its own facilities.



Figure 6: Welcome speech from Bern's mayor Alec von Graffenried (photo: Kleinová)

Their speeches were followed by the introduction of EAA President Felipe Criado-Boado who focused on the role of archaeology in today's society. He gave the word to the SEAC President César González-García who appreciated the joint meeting with the EAA and highlighted the thematic overlap between archaeology and cultural astronomy.

EAA representatives awarded the 2019 European Archaeological Heritage, EAA Honorary Membership and Student Award during the Opening Ceremony. The European Archaeological Heritage Prize is awarded by an independent Committee annually for an outstanding contribution to the generation of archaeological heritage knowledge and its dissemination, and to the protection, presentation and enhancement of the European archaeological heritage. The 2019 prize went to: Osman Kavala, Turkish philanthropist and heritage protector, in the individual category, and to the Pays Basque "Fundación Catedral Santa María in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain", in the institutional category.³

The EAA Student Award was given to Annabell Zander of the University of York for her paper „Lost in transition: tracing cultural traditions at the Pleistocene-Holocene transition in north-western Europe“.

² Full summary of the discussion can be found at TEA 62, autumn/fall 2019, available at: www.e-a-a.org/TEA

³ The reasoning for the selection and a detailed description of the awarded project can be found at: TEA 62, autumn/fall 2019, available at: www.e-a-a.org/TEA

As founding members and first President, Sir Colin Renfrew (University of Cambridge) and Kristian Kristiansen (University of Gothenburg) discussed in an entertaining dialogue during the Opening Ceremony which developments archaeology and archaeological heritage have experienced in the 25 years since the foundation of the EAA (Fig. 7). In addition, they reflected how archaeology can contribute to society, especially during times when pressing threats challenge the inclusive and progressive idea of Europe.



Figure 7: Opening Ceremony with dialogue of Colin Renfrew and Kristian Kristiansen (photo: A. Alterauge)

Young Post-doc researcher Caroline Heitz from the University of Bern took the chance in an academic TED-talk to look ahead. The discipline of archaeology is at a turning point with the increasing relevance of natural scientific methods in the humanities (science turn), the digitalization of our daily life (digital turn, artificial intelligence) but also global challenges like climate change or the refugee crisis, leading towards more pragmatic approaches. In addition, Caroline Heitz was representing all female researchers in archaeology who – admittedly – came short at the EAA 2019 Opening Ceremony. This shortcoming was not intended but resulted from the unequal gender distribution among the political and EAA representatives. The EAA will ensure that such an imbalance will never happen again.

The Opening Ceremony was accompanied by the summer ensemble of the University which played different compositions of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* and Bartok's *Hungarian Sketches*. The orchestra contributed greatly to the pleasant atmosphere of the event.

Afterwards (and on time!), the Welcome Reception took place in the choir of the French Church as well as in the opposite Kornhausforum. The organisers opted for two locations since the Church did not provide enough space, especially because many delegates only took part in the Welcome Reception (total number: ~700 attendees). Thanks to the warm temperatures, people enjoyed their wine, beer and appetizers also on the street in between the two buildings which created a very cozy and enjoyable ambiance.

After the first busy day of the conference on 5 September, the EAA Annual Party started at 8 pm at the Bierhübeli. Due to the now rainy and cold weather, the location could not express its full potential with the beer garden since the party had to take place inside. With about 750 attendees, the event was not overcrowded but the general mood was excellent, not least because of the cover band Take That and DJ Pow who animated the delegates to dancing. (Not to forget to mention one famous archaeologist giving a retrospect during the Opening Ceremony who was doing ballroom dancing in front of the stage.) Others preferred to stay in the lounge or on the gallery for more scientific discussions, accompanied by the free (and more) drinks. Cultural differences stroke out since the party started too early for Southern and Eastern European liking, but a lot of Swiss commuted to the conference and we wanted to allow them to get home with the last train(s).

On Friday 6 September, medieval archaeologists met at the MERC (Medieval European Research Community) party in the Kornhauskeller, which is the former cellar of a high baroque granary. While grain was stored in the upper floors of the granary, barrels of wine were kept in the cellar until it turned into a festival location at the end of the 19th century. With its pillars, cross-shaped vaults and frescoed arches the Kornhauskeller was the ideal choice for the MERC party.

The Annual Dinner was held on Saturday evening at the Gurten, Bern's local mountain, and was the closing event of the conference. It stands at 860 meters over sea level and can be accessed by cable car or by foot. The mountaintop offers a fantastic view across the entire city of Bern. The Annual Dinner took place at the Gurten Pavillon which provides the ideal surroundings to combine business, pleasure and culinary highlights. After an aperitif at the terrace, 280 delegates took their seats and were then entertained by the choir Canto sem Fronteiras with Swiss patois songs. Thanks were expressed to the EAA Secretariat, the local organisers, ArchaeoConcept and the volunteers but we would like to especially highlight the continuous engagement of President Felipe Criado-Boado who had always trusted in the success of the EAA Annual Meeting. The cooperation of the different institutions and people was characterised by mutual respect, the willingness to work together and the shared vision of the layout of this event.

The excursions organised by ArchaeoConcept took place prior to and after the conference and headed to several Roman (Augusta Raurica, Aventicum) and medieval cities (Fribourg, Thun, Spiez) as well as to the Swiss lakes and mountains. The delegates enjoyed the trips very much, especially since the guided tours were led by local archaeologists with the passion for their sites.

Finances

It required a certain willingness to take risks for the organisers since at the beginning, it was not foreseeable how many delegates could be expected in Bern. After the success of the Barcelona Meeting, it was clear that a certain decrease could be anticipated to which added the general perception of Switzerland as a high-priced country. Therefore, registration fee levels were kept at a reasonable level, being similar to the fees in 2018. The fees reached from 180 to 250 EUR for full payers (A countries) and from 120 to 190 EUR for students and B country members. Students and pensioners from B countries as well as accompanying persons had registration fees between 100 and 170 EUR. In all categories, early bird registrants were rewarded with discounted prices. In total, 1866 delegates registered for the Annual Meeting, of who 1786 paid registration fees. Volunteers, local organisers, members of the Advisory Board and Scientific Committee were free of charge. The registration fees accounted for approx. 290'000 EUR income. Other sources of income were advertisement and sponsorship and the revenues from the social events. However, since the total budget of the Annual Meeting added up to 420'000 EUR, only two thirds of the costs were covered by the conference fees. One third of the costs was generously covered by various institutions in Switzerland, amounting to 125'000 EUR. Thanks to this support, more travel grants could be awarded by the Oscar Montelius Foundation and eight keynote speakers could be invited to Bern.

Impact

The paraphernalia of the EAA 2019 Annual Meeting included the conference bag, the Programme Summary, the Programme Book (ordered on demand), give aways from the University of Bern and a local sweet, a so-called Mandelbärl. Several museums and institutions contributed flyers to the bag and attracted delegates to their houses, who profited from the free or reduced entrance. The Swiss Information Centre for Cultural Heritage Conservation (NIKE) and Swiss Archaeology (AS) produced a special volume of their bulletins⁴ dedicated to the EAA 2019 that were distributed during the Annual Meeting. It was the first time that the journals published contributions in English even though they kept their multilingualism.

The impact of the EAA is growing and its presence on social media is essential for the large number of events organised within the framework of the congress to reach a wider audience. Apart from the Annual Meeting website (www.e-a-a.org/eea2019), Twitter and Facebook accounts were therefore opened. For the first time during EAA history, a mobile app replaced the extended Programme Book and Abstract Book which was very much appreciated due to its practicality and the reduced environmental impact. The event was also covered by the media, both online⁵ and in the printed press. Examples are the reports from conference partners⁶ and Swiss national media.

At the occasion of the AMBM, members approved and adopted the “EAA 2019 Statement on Archaeology and the Future of Democracy”⁷ implying that EAA shares the common objective of Europe for peaceful and stable societies, founded on respect for human rights, intellectual and academic freedom, democracy, cultural diversity and the rule of law. By re-constructing past worlds, archaeology reflects the knowledge and values of today's world and is influenced by its social and political values. Therefore, archaeologists have a political responsibility as citizens and as researchers.

It is difficult to assess the impact of the EAA 2019 Meeting as so little time has elapsed since it was held. What is certain, nonetheless, is that it has placed the potential of Swiss archaeology firmly on the world stage. There can be no doubt that the EAA Annual Meeting was a unique opportunity for meeting and establishing or re-establishing professional networks in Switzerland, not only with the surrounding countries with shared language or geography, but also with the world.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following institutions: the Federal Office of Culture, Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, Swisslos Lottery Fund of the Canton of Bern, City of Bern, University of Bern, Burgergemeinde Bern and the Conference of Swiss Cantonal Archaeologists. Seed money was provided by the Faculty of the Humanities of the University of Bern.

In addition, we have received constant and practical support from the Archaeological Service of the Canton of Bern and Swiss Archaeology, who among other partners had booths at the exhibition tent near the coffee station.

All in all, many actors were involved in the organisation of the EAA Annual Meeting, and thanks go to all the people involved who remained unmentioned.

Bern, April 2020

⁴ NIKE-Bulletin 3, 2019: Archaeology in Switzerland (25th Annual Meeting EAA 2019); Archäologie Schweiz 42(3), 2019: 25 Years of EAA.

⁵ www.unibe.ch/aktuell/medien/media_relations/medienmitteilungen/2019/medienmitteilungen_2019/archaeologinnen_und_archaeologen_aus_aller_welt_zu_gast_in_bern/index_ger.html

⁶ Ellen Thiermann, as@eaa. Archäologie Schweiz 42(4), 30.

⁷ www.e-a-a.org/BernStatement