The Asset of Reading Archaeological Archive Records Together - Archaeology and History as Companion Disciplines

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Abstract

We present a methodology on how archaeologist and historian have practiced reading and interpretation of archaeological archive acts together. Our material of analysis is Danish botanist/archaeologist Georg Sarauw’s acts from the documentation of the site Mullerup in Zealand, Denmark excavated anno 1900. The project aims to contribute to practice-approaches to archaeological historiography and to new approaches to academic teamwork. Our methodology is material-semiotic while we discriminate and interpret scientific practices in hand written archive acts, by support of a verb-oriented method of reading.

Keywords: historiography; material-semiotic methodology; practices; situatedness
Introduction

We present a new line we have tested for teamwork between archaeologists and historians. It is a tryout of new approaches to how we write archaeological historiography together. In more detail it is a material-semiotic methodology on how we read and interpret archaeological archive acts together by discriminating and interpreting practices by the support of verb-oriented methodology. The project aims in turn to contribute to discussions on practice-history and to new approaches to scientific teamwork. In the following we summarize our point of departure and approach, followed by a few examples among the practices we recognized in our source material. Sources are the field reports produced by Danish archaeologist/botanist Georg Sarauw (1862-1928), at his anno 1900 excavation of the Stone Age site Mullerup, Western Zeeland, and filed in the National Museum of Copenhagen, Denmark. We give a few more words on the background of our approach, and of the assets and potentials of this methodological experiment. The project ideas and main results of our work were presented in two articles (Holmberg & Hjørungdal 2016; and in prep. 2016). We close this paper by a brief summary of conclusions so far.

Approaches to Historiography

We were from the beginning conscious about the fact that we joined an established, but innovative field of historiographical research. A few decades ago this track was stimulated by Bruce Trigger’s history of archaeological thought (Trigger 1989) and is now a broad field. Comprehensive analyses, syntheses, individual biographies as well as new approaches and methodologies are published regularly. Trigger and many other colleagues have discussed the role of contemporary ideas in the development of archaeology. A few colleagues have taken up again Ludwig Fleck’s Denkstile (Fleck 1935) as well as Bourdieu’s habitus approach (Bourdieu 1972), alongside various actor-network concepts (Latour 2005). An extra-disciplinary analysis of how archaeological knowledge is constituted through time is developed in a feminist perspective by the philosopher Alison Wylie (Wylie 2002). Temporal aspects of epistemic are also focused on by Anders Gustafsson who problematized the question of what the history of archaeology is, asking whether it is history or archaeology (Gustafsson 2001). Additionally, some later works on methodologies explore aspects of approaches to practices (e.g. Yarrow 2003; Diaz Andreu 2012; Jensen ed. 2012). The latter works demonstrate the intensified role of archives in academic historiography, and thus of archive acts in approaches to archaeological historiography. We joined this discourse by a focus on the fact that archaeology and history share the sources of archive files but our disciplines’ relationships to archives are partly different: in our specific case archaeologists have written the excavation reports and are also experts in the qualities of materiality; historians are...
specialists in source critical approaches to written documents and their sociopolitical contexts of production. This shared, but diverse connection should be further explored and built up, with the aim to work as a resource to methodology of academic co-operation. In order to find out more about our various attitudes to archives and how we can gain by their particular potentials, we used to discuss aspects of situatednesses and expertise of academic disciplines and of their respective scholars, and in which locations they encounter and grow operative together. Next we summarize the historical context and material of analysis and also some points on how we co-operated.

**Approaching Georg Sarauw, his Context and Archive Material**

The archive reports on the excavation of Mullerup are written in Danish by Georg Sarauw. They are extensive and a multitude of practices during the fieldwork have been recorded, in writing as well as in sketching. This quality makes the record material effective to a methodological development on practice approaches. Supported by his detailed record, our project has followed how Sarauw came to his conclusions on chronological definition of the cultural layer and the bone and antler objects in the site. Mullerup is situated in western Zealand, belongs largely to the Boreal Mesolithic Maglemose culture and was famous because it came to be the first site to be placed in the so called *Hiatus* between the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic. With his multifaceted background, Sarauw was the right person for the task of interpreting Mullerup. He was educated and located in a scientific pivot, learned in archaeology as well as in geology, botany, zoology among other natural sciences, in addition to several dead and living languages. Sarauw’s formation also shows that he is situated in the middle of, and at the same time makes up an illustration to the changing conditions in European and Danish intellectual life of his time. This was generally a sociopolitical setting characterized by tensions between humanity and sciences, between idealism and materialism, between conservative ideas and ideas of evolution, progress and emancipation, between traditional culture and avant-garde art, between dreams of military conquest and struggle for disarmament and between authoritarian rule and democratic mass movements (Mayer 2010: 189-210; 279-299).

Excavation reports is a material-semiotic class of source material and thus a genre of *written* material which is also clear about documentation of *practices* and of the use and role of *materiality*, not only of thinking and writing – yes, probably less a source on ideas and thinking. Archaeological field reports have previously been discussed in a few of their tempo-spatial aspects (Hodder 1989; Bradley 2006; Yarrow 2003; Hjørungdal 2009), but a number of analytical points can be added. Among them is the importance of their heterogeneous character; they include photos and a manifold of written orders such as letters, notes, tags, receipts, coupons, and by these they are a rich source to various scientific encounters. The documents relate principal aspects of what arose during the excavation and interpretation of a site; which
and how decisions were made, and frequently they include analyses made by
the natural scientists in co-operation with the archaeologist in charge.

The practices we choose for analysis in a field report have to be explicitly
articulated and named for the analysis we plan. Preparing our analysis we
therefore asked questions about, What scholars did in the field, with which
instruments; the how’s and where’s in their process of interpretation and also in
publishing. According to our methodology, we reasonably looked for verbs.
Scientific working procedures found in reports consist of written verbs in
context with descriptions of the use of tools, instruments and materials of
various characters in intra-action with the scholar’s body and choreography.
Verbs describe something about how a material object like an instrument or a
trowel is used and how it intra-acts with the scholar, the soil, the site and the
surroundings, how it assists and also how it can cause complications as well as
useful results. By the support of verbs, we mainly looked for practices of
specific interest to the question of how our own companion disciplines can be
operative together. There are several, but we have confined them to a few finds
of characteristic practices/verbs. In the context of archive material we could
approve the idea that the verb is an obvious site for encounters between words,
human actions and materiality.

The Mullerup investigation: scientific practices aiming at chronological
explanation

In the field Georg Sarauw’s co-operated with amateur archaeologist/
teacher Mathias Mathiassen, with a couple of younger colleagues and with the
local peasants and bog-workers. The latter people used to cut peat for fuel and
the prehistoric sharp flint tools which initiated that there was a site, were
wounding the workers’ hands and bare feet. In his report Sarauw tells details
on what he exactly makes in the site; he describes his way of digging, in which
geographical directions he dug, how he confined and moved in the site. He
wants as well to be exact and systematic: The report contains several letters to
the National Museum in which he asks for order about what he next shall be
expected to do in Mullerup and how; he also asks for order if to continue the
investigation and he asks the museum for suitable equipment for the field and
for the artefacts. Sarauw was keen to make small, very quick sketches of
profiles and of how he laid out his excavation ditch (Sarauw 1900: passim).
The small number of photos from the excavation reveals that he was a good
photographer, too.

Measurements in the site were basically made by Mathiassen, but Sarauw
found it necessary to control and teach Mathiassen about his measurements.
This education took as well up his teaching Mathiassen geology by the
explanation of bog conditions, and by suggesting literature about bog geology
(not least by Swedish pioneer scholars in quaternary geology). An important
method was to organize material finds by comparison to known sites and finds
in a European perspective, and by discarding those sites and objects evidently
not in accordance with the Mullerup material. Site types thoroughly discussed but explicitly discarded were Irish Crannogs and Swiss Pfahlbauten. This is also related in his original article (Sarauw 1903: 175ff).

Sarauw’s knowledge from botany studies about microscopy became essential to the identification procedures; he tells how he was cleaning bog samples, in order to pick out seeds of water species and microscoping them for botanical classifications.

Practices executed by/with various co-operators throughout the interpretative process, are as well many. Teacher Mathiassen excavated carefully in the site, and as a clever amateur archaeologist/botanist, he made comparisons in order to try to identify items. Some years earlier he had by the way made a botanical survey of the bog area. His documentation of botanical finds - particularly of Pine (Pinus Silvestris L.) in the bog had a leading-edge effect as they drove discussion with Sarauw and dynamically helped out the geological situation in the Boreal. Further, geologist Hartz examined arctic clay in search of Ice Age/arctic species of plants, but there were none. This is an additional way of practicing discarding, which has the aim of drawing conclusions and boundaries in the process of placing the site tempo-spatially.

During the time of the excavation Sarauw was accommodated at the local inn (named Mullerup Kro) and sat there writing letters as well as scientific notes for the report, and he read scientific literature in order to get grip of the geological and botanical circumstances of Mullerup. He also housed the find material at the inn, and tried to pack and line the finds in a suitable way for transport by train to Copenhagen. Sarauw had to negotiate with the museum about packing, protection and storing of finds. In his record he was detailed on how he would pack and label the find material, particularly the bone finds; packing and lining the material as well as the size of packages with finds are important. To get enough bags for the finds seems to have stayed a problem; the available newspaper he had got was not suitable for packing wet bones and objects from the bog, and instead he ordered brown lining paper for the security of wet items. Finally he sent the finds, packed and lined by express train to Copenhagen.

In the progress of the excavation Sarauw also visited museums abroad with the aim to find parallel bone objects, which were not at all published yet. He found them in Königsberg’s Museum.

All of the practices summarized here, are found in the archive files which contains a report and letters (Sarauw 1900) and in the original printed article (Sarauw 1903). A number of different practices in the field and off the field were needed in order to come to grip with the unfamiliar stratigraphy and the unknown types of objects found in Mullerup. Much of the specific thinking and writing was made off the site; at the inn and later in the museum and at Sarauw’s home. There were various physical and geographical locations for the practices needed; in the field, at the inn, the museum, home. It was outdoor and indoor; it was in Denmark and abroad.

All of the practices of measuring, levelling, writing, reading, thinking, discarding, and also discussing with colleagues and amateurs, they all together
made Sarauw able to make an interpretation of the stratigraphy in Mullerup and
to draw conclusions about how to situate it in time. His results became subject
to much discussion on chronology, stratigraphy and the old Hiatus topic.
However later on, his results was accepted for the establishment of a real
Mesolithic, a new physical epoch in European prehistory, an era wished for by
many scholars and contested by others. A special characteristic of the
Mesolithic is anyhow that it was established on other principles than are most
other eras; it was the result of in situ stratigraphic conditions and on practices
out in the field, as opposed to an epoch founded in typology. Archaeological
layers’ and artifacts’ encounters with the elaborated methods and practices
from geology and botany, microsoping and levelling, were crucial to the
possibility of drawing conclusions on chronology.

The Approach and its Background

The companion disciplines approach defines our methodology of
coopération that has made it possible to practice co-reading the way we
demonstrate. It is adjusted from Donna Haraway’s outlook on interactions
between differently situated subjects (Haraway 1988; 2008). We asked how
and where do subjects/disciplines meet and become operative together when
they aim to produce mutual results. Additionally our methodology is material-
semiotic: in the chosen archive material we discriminate and interpret
practices by support of verb-oriented methodology. This method is initially
developed at British Universities on substantives. Dispersed to verbs by social
and historical disciplines, it seeks to identify and analyze practices and has the
advantages that it can be achieved through combining different theoretical and
methodological approaches. Gräslund Berg et al. have adjusted the method to
their study of gender and work practices by looking for verbs observed in data
base material accumulated from specific modern historical contexts (Gräslund
Berg et al 2013). We in turn, adjusted the method to our context which is a
very different one to a database context, as it is hand-written archaeological
material from the archive files. As a result, we needed to interrogate and
enlarge on a few aspects before we could make the methodology effective to
our context. We share the buzzword practices with Gräslund et al., but
practices include a manifold of verbs and acts characteristic to discipline and to
situation. Characteristic to archaeological reports are thus explanations of long-
term, enduring and repetitive work procedures, all described with verbs. The
verbs support our reading about if and how a material object is
intra-acts with the scholar, the site, the bog and the surroundings. In this
important aspect our approach also relate to Karen Barad’s notion of material-
semiotic practices (Barad 2007; cf. Mol 2002). This is an approach able to give
a push to the study of material-discursive practices as well as to new ideas and
practices about academic co-operation between different disciplines with
different expertise. With the support of such a co-operative methodology of
reading verbs and practices in texts, we were able to articulate more explicitly
definitions, descriptions and analyses of the practices Sarauw used in the process of interpreting Mullerup. It demonstrates a characteristic example of a complex scientific process behind clear conclusions.

Conclusions

It has been very useful to explore questions and methods about how archaeology and history can co-operate in writing history of archaeology. Our experiment takes up practice history and co-operation with history as a potential still unexplored. Archaeological field reports are tempo-spatial documents on various aspects of scientific practices. They give abundant examples of how practices of excavation and documentation are performed, and combined by excavators’ use of materialities such as trowels, instruments, together with writing. The analysis of scientific practices was to us a means by which we could grasp details about how Sarauw arrived at his chronological interpretation of Mullerup. A next step was that his scientific practices were contextualized and regarded against their anno 1800/1900 temporal, scientific, and sociocultural background. So far we are content with the initial co-operation in a companion disciplines approach. This time co-operation was planned because archaeology initiated it to its own benefit. The methodological experiment was untested prior to this. Although archaeology and history share a long academic history of encounters in many respects, encounters and co-operation have not been approached by any explicit methodology. Results of the project were generated on four levels (Holmberg & Hjørungdal 2016; and in prep 2016): The first level problematizes the question of how to write history of archaeology; the second level elaborates on a few specific issue of how archaeology and history can co-operate methodologically on that question; on the third level we have gained a more detailed knowledge about practices and encounters in Georg Sarauw’s interpretation of the cultural layer in the Hiatus as it was recognized in Mullerup in 1900; in more detail we have got a more extensive background to how an archaeological conclusion was established through small steps of measurement, comparison, discarding and discussions. We have drawn conclusions on social organization of the archaeological investigation (scholar amateurs, local peasants and labourers), on agrarian practices and archaeology (sites, i.a. Mullerup, discovered by peat cutting in bogs), and the use of scientific instruments (theodolite and microscope). The fourth level is on how to methodologically problematize the issue of interdisciplinarity - a widely applied term in archaeology. Each of these four levels exemplifies results of analyses initiated by contemporary academic encounters. In the context of archive material the verb is an obvious site for encounters between words, human actions and materiality. The value of the Companion Disciplines Approach is the approval of the respective professional skill in each discipline, archaeology and history. The value of the approach is also the flexibility and potential to be adjusted to context, source genre and form of co-operation.
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Archive material

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