



Berlin, 20 September 2018

WALL TEXTS

Gropius Bau

Restless Times. Archaeology in Germany

21 September 2018 – 6 January 2019

The objects displayed here have a history of mobility – in several respects: they were created and used by people in the distant past, then recovered by archaeologists, and finally brought here to be presented in our exhibition. The objects were all discovered during the past two decades, and selected to represent all the states of Germany. They also cover a wide chronological span, a 200 000 year stretch from the Palaeolithic to the 20th century. A wide gulf of centuries, even millennia, may separate us from the people who left these artefacts as their testimony, but our own lives and reality are still shaped by similar experiences. Mobility and change are not exclusive hallmarks of our own age: they have been around through the ages in varying intensity. The four sections of our exhibition – mobility, exchange, conflict and innovation – all revolve around the way that people, things and ideas move around. These aspects are all combined in the spectacular finds from the Roman period of Cologne exhibited in the interior courtyard.

Mobility

Throughout the ages, people have left their homes for a variety of reasons, for a short time or for good, alone or in small groups, or as part of a larger migration. The confined landscape of Europe offered favourable conditions for such movement, considering that a person can walk some 30 km in a day, roughly the distance covered by a marathon runner. Archaeologists are constantly confronted with signs of this mobility. The ground holds many traces of former trails and roads, and the personal possessions of individuals provide clues to the paths they trod in life. With the application of new scientific methods, even the bodily remains of such individuals are becoming a vital source of information on the major migration movements which shaped the face of Europe.

Exchange

It's better if it's exotic – this may sound like a comment on modern consumer behaviour, but it can also be applied to any other period in history. The possession of 'something special' has always been seen as a clear indicator of status. The phenomenon can be observed in the Neolithic (with its prized jadeite or flint axes), in the Bronze Age (with valued objects made from the namesake metal), or in the Migration Period (where the red semi-precious stone known as garnet was all the rage). Trade in such goods promised a neat profit, and it gave birth to an exchange network extending far beyond Europe. In time, the hubs of this network – such as Cologne or Lübeck – would evolve into centres of urban development.

Conflict

The movement of people, things and ideas around Europe did not always run smoothly. The history of the continent is marked by frequent wars and

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violence. Archaeologists have begun to take a closer look at the history and structure of conflict in recent years, an approach facilitated by new scientific methods for the documentation of larger sites such as battlefields. War is only one of the many manifestations of conflict, however. The frequent intentional destruction of cultural and religious monuments is another. Archaeologists encountering the remains of ruined works of art are often forced to ponder what could have motivated such vandalism.

Innovation

Nothing moves as fast as a good idea. It will be disseminated at surprising speed, until the original inventor can hardly be made out. Who, for instance, invented art? Well, the earliest sculptures were found on the Swabian Alb. And who invented the wheel? The oldest known examples were discovered near Lake Constance. These examples also illustrate how innovation can be both technical and cultural. In order to understand how environment and the afterlife or society and nature were perceived, we need to assume a transfer of ideas and knowledge.

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