

III. Notes

Towards a Social History of Archaeology: The Case of the Excavators of Early Iron Age Burial Mounds in Southern Germany

Nils Müller-Scheessel
(mueller-scheessel@gmx.net)

While the general history of archaeology has received a growing interest lately¹, these efforts still lack a common research-guiding agenda. Furthermore, most of the studies still concentrate on biographies and event history. The embedding of archaeology in the structures and conditions of its time is still a kind of *terra incognita*. The few well known publications (e. g. Hudson 1981; Kristiansen 1981; Patterson 1986; 1995) emphasize the gap only more.

The lack of a significant amount of literature especially on the social history of archaeology is all the more surprising as the early interest in archaeology shows a clear social bias: archaeology was (and still is?) a recreational activity for the educated and the well-off. While Hudson's book in particular is very readable, it is clearly meant to provide only a very broad picture. Along with the other publications mentioned above it is now somewhat dated; the lack of recent works on this topic thus highlight the lack of interest in the social history of archaeology even more.² However, this essay does not deal with this deplorable fact, but seeks to present some 'hard' data on only one, albeit important activity of early archaeological excavations, particularly those of burial mounds. Its focus is on Southern Germany and on graves from the early Iron Age.³

The Frequency of Excavations

The earliest records concerning the excavations of burial mounds in Southern Germany date back to 17th and 18th centuries, and surprisingly for their time, they were quite thorough. Many excavators did not reach such a standard until the beginning of the 20th century. As far as these earliest excavations have been documented, they were carried out or commissioned by nobles (see below).

Unfortunately, we have to take it for granted that many activities in the 18th and even the 19th centuries remained undocumented. Therefore, it does not make much sense to compare the frequency of documented excavations before 1800. Instead, Figure 1 shows the frequency of excavation during the 180 year period between 1820 and 2000. The illustration demonstrates a very tight connection to the political situation at each point of time. For example, it is remarkable how clearly the revolutionary events around 1848 and the wars of 1870/71, 1914–1918 and 1939–1945 are discernible. Obviously, during these periods there was little time and possibilities for, and limited interest in, excavation. But this is not the only development worthy of note.

In the 19th century, there are two peaks in excavation activities, the first in the 1830s, and the second in the last quarter of the 19th century. The reasons for these two peaks are investigated below in connection with the excavators themselves. Another peak in the 1930s was due to the development

¹ In Germany alone, for example, a number of books on this topic have been published in the last years. See Rohrer & Müller-Scheessel 2004 for a review.

² For a general account of the state of the historiography of archaeology see now Murray 2005.

³ The data presented here is based on my dissertation 'Untersuchungen zum Wandel hallstattzeitlicher Bestattungssitten in Süd- und Südwestdeutschland'. The data will be available as a Microsoft Access data base when the work has been published.

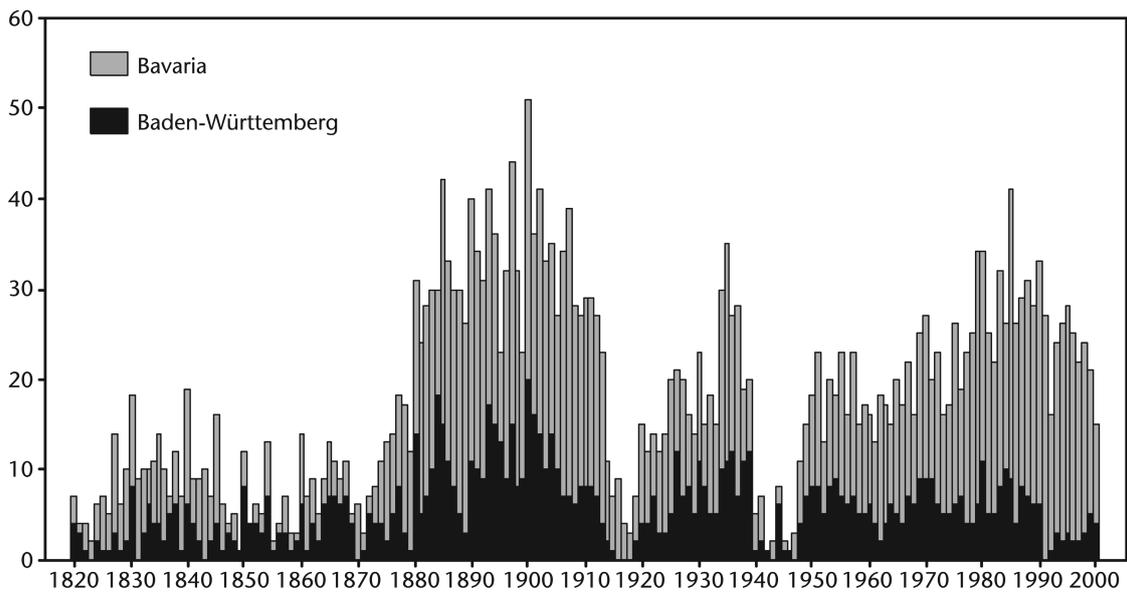


Figure 1. Number of excavations in Iron Age burial mounds in Southern Germany between 1820 and 2000.

of a proper “Denkmalpflege”, while the peak in 1944 had to do with the large-scale construction of defence structures against the approaching Allied armies in Baden. After the Second World War extensive building activities lead to many new discoveries of archaeological features, but it was only in the 1970s that this was accompanied by more jobs in archaeology. Also, financial problems in 1990s due to the reunification of the two Germanies seem to be mirrored in Figure 1.

As a final remark, it needs to be pointed out that the development sketched above is not totally the same for Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg (Figure 2). The reasons for this still merit closer scrutiny.⁴ For the beginning of the 1980s the curve of Baden-Württemberg shows a sharp bend, while the one of Bavaria is still steep. One reason for this could be due to the founding of the ‘Beihefte der Bayerischen Vorgeschichtsblätter’ in the 1980s, which made thorough reports on all excavation activities possible. In adjoining regions different tendencies can be found: the development in the Northwest of Switzerland, for example, is completely different (Kurz 1997: 4 Abb. 1).⁵

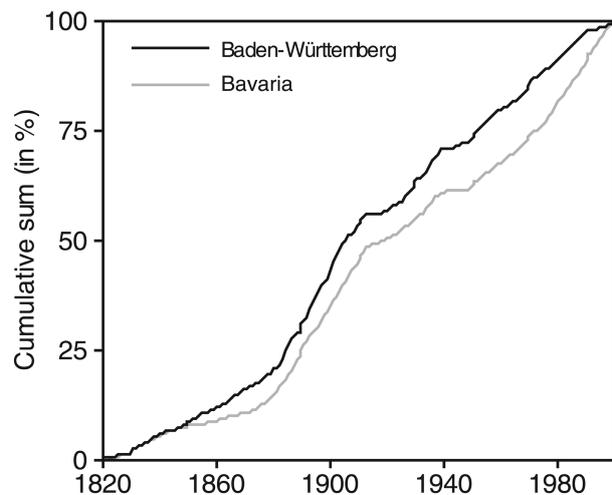


Figure 2. Proportional cumulative sum of excavations in Iron Age burial mounds in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg between 1820 and 2000. See Note 4.

The Social Standing of the Excavators

The excavators of Iron Age burial mounds can be roughly divided into three groups (Figure 3 with Table 1). The first group comprises the old elite, mainly noblemen, clergymen and military men, of which the latter two often also belonged to the nobility. The second group comprises the new urban elite, the bourgeoisie, e.g. teachers, lawyers, physicians, chemists, shopkeepers. The third and

⁴ The maximal difference of 12% between Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg is statistically highly significant on the 0,1%-level when tested with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov-Test ($n_{\text{Baden-Württemberg}} = 1075$; $n_{\text{Bavaria}} = 2359$; $D_{0,001} = 0,072$).

⁵ But see Saile 1998: 39 ff. with fig. 25 for a similar development in the adjoining Wetterau in Hesse.

last group comprises the lower ranks of society, especially farmers and craftsman.

If we compare the two main periods of archaeological activities, 1820 to 1848 and 1871 to 1899 respectively, each lasting 19 years, a surprisingly clear picture emerges. In the earlier time frame, the excavations were mainly carried out by the ‘old elite’, primarily by noblemen, as clergymen, military officers and especially foresters belonged to this segment of society as well. This group had either the means for digging and/or the access to the monuments, because its members travelled frequently. It can be taken for granted, for example, that foresters knew their woods, where many of the better preserved mounds were located, and clergymen also knew their parishes very well. The first peak in the 1830s coincides with the foundation of many historical societies, in the phase of the “Vormärz”⁶. During this time the first systematic excavation reports made their appearance in the also newly founded historical journals. It is interesting, however, that these historical societies were already mainly driven by members of the bourgeoisie.

Still, it was only during the second period that the second and third social group, the bourgeoisie and the lower ranks, carried out most of the excavations. This period coincides with the real ‘slaughtering’ or decimation of burial mounds which began after the founding of the German Reich in 1871. For this development, a couple of reasons can be held responsible. First, at this time the “Bürgertum” was looking for new goals and aims, and after the “Reichsgründung” further political engagement seemed superfluous⁷. Additionally, towards the end of the 19th century, long-term economic growth made it possible for many museums to build up large collections of archaeological objects from all over Germany and beyond (Weiss 1999: 76) and thus also built up considerable expectations and demands which were satisfied by looting burial mounds. Although it can be taken for granted that many mounds were ‘excavated’ by peasants, without any official roles, in search of hidden treasures, it was only after the museum boom in the mid 19th century and later that it became viable to decimate burial

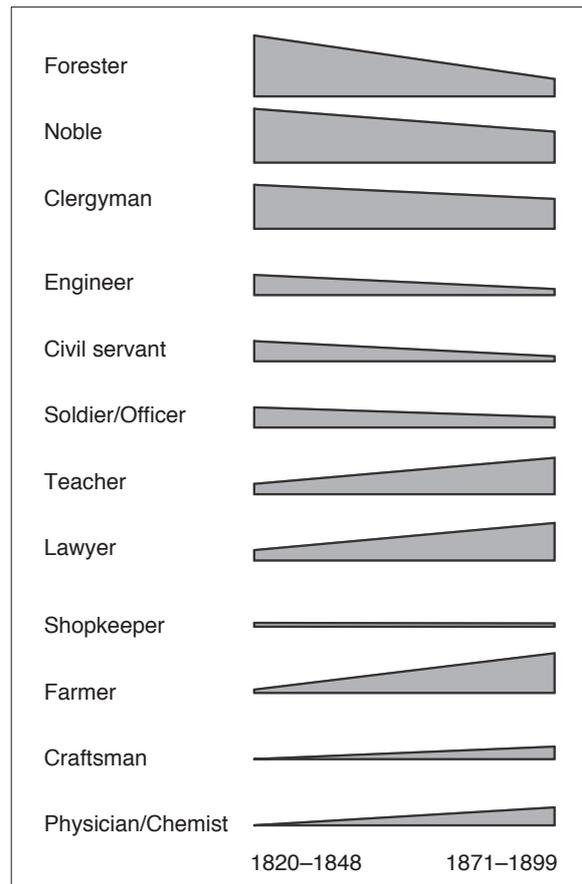


Figure 3. Profession of the excavators of Iron Age burial mounds in Southern Germany in the time periods 1820–1848 and 1871–1899 and percentage of the excavations commissioned. Cf. Table 1.

Profession	1820–1848	1871–1899
Forester	18	17
Noble	16	30
Clergyman	13	29
Engineer	6	6
Civil servant	6	5
Soldier/Officer	6	10
Teacher	3	35
Lawyer	3	36
Shopkeeper	1	3
Farmer	1	38
Craftsman	0	12
Physician/Chemist	0	17

Table 1. Profession of the excavators of Iron Age burial mounds in Southern Germany in the time periods 1820–1848 and 1871–1899 and number of the excavations commissioned. Cf. Figure 3.

⁶ Boockmann *et al.* 1972; Vierhaus 1977; Reuter 2000.

⁷ See Sell 1981 [1953]: 213 ff. on the downfall of the German liberal movement as a result of the politics of chancellor O. v. Bismarck.

mounds for a living. That is probably why, between 1871 and 1899, more people from the lower ranks of societies went into the business of excavating. A further, and at first sight peripheral, reason for the growth of excavation activities lies in the development of the railway system in the second half of the 19th century. On the one hand, this development led to large-scale earth movements which in turn led to the discovery and destruction of many burial mounds (Sklenár 1983: 67). On the other hand, with a dense network of railway connections it was easier to make short term visits to the wider countryside surrounding cities, which included visiting archaeological sites of interest (Hudson 1981: 43 for Britain). This made digging a kind of holiday entertainment for the bourgeoisie of the cities.

In short, the shift in the individuals responsible for the excavations is remarkable and mirrors the changes in society at large.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the development of excavation activities was closely tied to political conditions in general. Furthermore, it became clear that the activities underwent significant social 'sea-tides' or 'waves' that can also be attributed to social changes of German society in the 19th century on the whole.

To get a better understanding of the underlying processes it seems especially fruitful to get similar statistics for other regions. Swiss developments already hint at the possibility that such development differed across Europe. This would also help to get away from the kind of anecdote that still prevails in this sector.

Unfortunately, we have only very little information regarding the excavations themselves. In virtually all cases before the 20th century, it is very likely that the commissioners of the excavations were not involved directly but supervised at a distance, if they were present at all. Information regarding wages are difficult to ascertain as well. For example, we know about the wages of the workers employed by the well known archaeologist Carl Schuchhardt, who in 1906 received 0,45 Mark per hour (Müller-Scheessel *et al.* 2001: 313 note 64). Assuming a ten-hour-day, this quite closely resembles the average German worker's wage of that time (Kuczynski 1967: 328). However, without further comparable data, this information is only of limited value.

To conclude, we still know far too little about the recruitment and the circumstances of excavations. This information – apart from that presented above – would be vital for writing a true social history of archaeological excavation activities. This paper cannot be more than a step in this direction.

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Thurstan Shaw on the Early History of the World Archaeological Congress (WAC)

Pamela Jane Smith
(pjs1011@cam.ac.uk)

The first meeting of the World Archaeological Congress occurred in Southampton, U. K. from September 1–6, 1986. This Congress was originally conceived as the XIth meeting of the International Union of Pre- and Protohistoric Sciences (IUPPS). However, in September and October 1985, the British Executive Committee responsible for staging the Congress decided to ban South African and Namibian participation. Although this move was made in accordance with the recommendation of the United Nations Special Committee Against *Apartheid*, it nevertheless resulted in a contentious, bitter dispute in which many British and most American academics argued that the academic freedom of the South African delegates should not be unfairly sacrificed for political reasons. Amidst this divisive debate, the IUPPS and other funding organisations withdrew financial and moral support from the upcoming Congress. Peter Ucko, the National Secretary in charge of arrangements for the Southampton Congress, decided, with several others, to proceed.

In the following excerpt from his unpublished and unfinished memoirs, the Africanist, Thurstan Shaw, briefly describes his personal experiences as he lived through this change.

“By 1985, I had completed the Iwo Eleru Report and it was in the pipe-line for publication as the first monograph in *West African Journal of Archaeology's* new series and I had handed over to David Aiyedun all my Wushishi material so that publication remained his responsibility. Thus I had done all that I needed to do to fulfill my obligations towards my excavations and field-work; I could die with a good conscience. I would now be *really* retired and not do anything more actively in archaeology.

How wrong I was to be; I was dragged out of retirement by a number of offers. One of those came from Peter Ucko who rang up and started talking about the forthcoming UISPP Congress, to take place in Southampton in September 1986. Would I lend a hand in putting African archaeology on the world map at that Congress? This was a request difficult to refuse. Would I organise the African archaeology section together with Bassey Andah? Again difficult to refuse. And so it was to be.