



Living History: Reenacted Prehistory between Research and Popular Performance

Historical and archaeological topics have been very popular for many years. This is substantiated by a variety of events and developments: well-attended exhibitions, so-called 'medieval markets', an ongoing success of historical documentaries, a booming market of specialized books and magazines, as well as star-studded historical movies. 'Living history' formats on television or historical 'docu-soaps' also attract millions of viewers. Remarkably, documentaries on pre- and protohistory are the second largest contingent in German historical TV programs beyond those on World War II. Moreover, this period is very popular in open-air museums or so-called 'themed walks' – for instance, the crossing of the Alps 'in the steps' of 'Ötzi the Iceman'. While these approaches to 'popular history' have been en vogue for at least two decades, academic historical research has discovered this field of study only recently.

The project deals with the reenactment of prehistory – well-known as 'living history'. Research is focused on television documentaries, open-air museums, heritage sites and 'themed walks'. The research group will examine the production of 'living history' and the manifold relationships between this phenomenon and academic archaeology. Therefore, it integrates methods and knowledge of archaeologists, media/contemporary historians and empirical ethnologists/folklorists. The project is financed by the Volkswagen Foundation.

Involved institutions/project partners:



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