



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

How the EAA came into my life

Willems, W.J.H.

Citation

Willems, W. J. H. (2004). How the EAA came into my life. *The European Archaeologist 10Th Anniversary Conference*, 7(9). Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/9866>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/9866>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

approved at the Annual Business Meeting in Ravenna in 1997.

My association with the EAA in its formative years has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career in archaeology. I have so many memories of great friendship at meetings in every corner of Europe, from Ljubljana to Göteborg, from Santiago de Compostela to Prague, from Ravenna to Riga: we worked hard but we managed to enjoy ourselves and laugh a great deal, as well as sampling Europe's rich culinary and vinous heritage. Like most professional institutions of this kind the EAA has been slow to attract members and to establish a role in the wider world of politics and government. However, I am confident that the turning point has now been reached and that I shall have the inestimable pleasure of watching the Association grow

Reminiscence

One of my most vivid memories concerns the outstanding rock art of Foz Côa in Portugal, which was threatened with submersion beneath the waters of a new reservoir. At the time of the 1st Annual Meeting in 1995 the University of Santiago de Compostela, where we were meeting, was celebrating its Quincentenary. The King and Queen of Spain were in town, as was the then President of Portugal, Mario Soares. Our Portuguese colleagues managed to secure a meeting with him, and Kristian and I went to meet him in his suite at the sumptuous Parador, accompanied by Susana Oliveira Jorge and Teresa Marques from Portugal. We were told that the President could only spare us fifteen minutes, and so we made a rapid presentation of the facts. He was, of course, fully aware of the situation and in complete sympathy with our case. However, as he pointed out, the President is no more than a figure head and unable to influence policy matters such as this. But he went on to remind us that a general election was imminent in Portugal and that the opposition (his own party) was certain to win. He advised us therefore to have a letter ready to land on the new Prime Minister's desk on his first day in office. We drafted a letter immediately and Kristian had it on its way as soon as the result of the election was known. The rest, as they say, is history.

For me this important meeting also represented a personal triumph. Susana and Teresa, two intense and eloquent young women, had been told that they could join the delegation to meet Dr Soares on pain of death should they try to monopolize the conversation, since we needed to present a case on behalf

of the whole community of European archaeologists. I take pride in having succeeded in the possibly unique feat of keeping them quiet for forty-five minutes - for that was how long our meeting eventually lasted. After the first fifteen minutes an aide appeared but was waved away, and this was repeated fifteen minutes later. It was only when the anguished aide appeared for the third time that the President finally brought the interview to a close. I like to think that he explained his lateness to Los Reyes Católicos by recounting to them the case that we had put.

How the EAA came into my Life

Willem Willems

The EAA came into my life sometime in early 1991. It began with a telephone call from my friend Kristian Kristiansen, who at that time was Head of the Danish State Organisation for the Protection of Ancient Monuments. I had become the Director of ROB, the Dutch State Antiquities service, some years before, so we were more or less direct counterparts. More than that: we were also soulmates in that we both were passionate about the role of research as an integral component of archaeological heritage management and the need to keep both branches into one united field of archaeology. I remember being interested in what he had to say about the need for a European journal, but suddenly being poised on the edge of my chair when the conversation turned to the need for European-level organisation in archaeology

Those were hectic days, full of change. I had been called to Strasbourg in late 1988, to represent my government in a committee of experts convened by the Council of Europe that was to rewrite the rapidly outdated Convention of London of 1969 into a new European Convention on the protection of the archaeological heritage, more geared to the needs of modern society with its rapid infrastructural and spatial development. Being accustomed to international meetings firmly within the ivory tower context of strictly academic archaeology, working on this committee under the chairmanship of Gustaf Trotzig from Sweden had opened my eyes to much broader and more inclusive international perspectives on archaeology. In those same years, the Iron Curtain had disappeared and especially through my close contacts with German colleagues, I had become aware of the enormous consequences for the role and the organisation of archaeology and the need for reunification after almost half a century of

separation. Internationally, there was only IUPPS, the International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences, that had been able to survive only by a strict policy of 'pure' scientific research interests and a formal structure that – at that time – was rather unappealing to many of us, then still the 'younger generation'.

So of course I promised Kristian to come to the Maison Suger in Paris and take part in the discussion that followed and, like Henry Cleere, by the end of that meeting I found myself co-opted on an International Steering Committee under the driving force of Kristian. I vividly remember the need for a very large beer at the end of the day. So did many of us, and we settled down on the first available pavement café which was at the Boulevard Saint Michel around the corner. Alain Schnapp must have been absent, because there was no warning. We ordered big beers, then a second round, and when it was time to settle up we had a collective heart attack: pavement cafés on the 'Boule Miche' are the most expensive in all of Paris. I vividly remember Gustav Trozig producing his most devious smile and declaring "I am the only one for which these beers are still cheap". Worst of it, he was right, too.

Such minor setbacks serve to hone a person into the realities of life in international cooperation, which for me has never stopped since. Parallel to the work in the Steering Committee of what was to become the EAA, the activities with the Council of Europe continued after the new convention was formally adopted by the Council of Ministers on Malta in January 1992. The 'Bronze Age Campaign' was launched, primarily intended to raise public awareness of a common European heritage. In mid-September 1994 that took me to Vienna, on a boat trip along the Danube with a passenger's list that must have read as the 'who-is-who in archaeological Europe'. That was the first occasion where Øivind Lunde, myself, and some others involved in both processes such as Geoff Wainwright from English Heritage, first discussed the need for closer cooperation not only between archaeologists in Europe, but also between the state organisations responsible for heritage management in European countries. But first, there was the formal inauguration of the EAA. At the end of that 3-day boat trip, on Wednesday September 21, we – I remember the entire Kristiansen family and Colin Renfrew – were taken by a van that the efficient Predrag Novaković had sent for us from the Danube to Ljubljana, making some detour to avoid Croatia where the war was going on. The

inaugural meeting went well, with Colin as kind of a European archaeological godfather presenting a memorable inaugural address, Henry Cleere in his inimitable way piloting the meeting through discussions about the statutes and such, and Kristian being in charge and elected as the inspiring first President of the Association. I was glad to be off the hook, because at home the pressure for reorganisation of the State Service was mounting and I could ill afford spending ever more time on international business.

In 1995, my hands were so tied by work at home that at the last moment I was unable even to attend the first EAA meeting in Santiago. I remained involved in the initiative, born on the Danube, to start a discussion platform for the heads of State Antiquities Services, but it was Øivind Lunde that organised a first meeting in Santiago in the form of an EAA round table. As he was going to leave office by the end of that year, we had agreed that I would take over after Santiago and that is what happened. Out of this process of EAA round tables finally emerged what is now the *Europae Archaeologia Consilium* (EAC) at an inaugural meeting in Strasbourg in November 1999.¹ At the European level, EAC is the necessary complement to EAA and there are many things the one is more suitable for than the other. By its very nature, for example, EAC as an umbrella for State organisations cannot lobby for archaeology or criticise official policies in the way that EAA can, and EAA cannot put into practice many of the initiatives discussed at its meetings in the way that the members of EAC can. I was President of the EAA in 1999 so I was glad the Presidency of EAC could pass into the able hands of Adrian Olivier. I continued to serve as secretary for one year, providing a direct link between the two now separate bodies. I still regret, however, that I have never been able to realise completely my vision of creating more force for archaeology in Europe by cementing the two together as fully independent but closely interrelated bodies. Fortunately, in practice, things seem to work out pretty well so far.

I am happy that, after Santiago, I never missed another EAA Annual Meeting. By 1996 things at home had settled in a way that gave me more room to manoeuvre and in Riga in 1996 I was elected Secretary and took over from Henry Cleere. Working with Kristian – still very much in his role of inspiring leader with less concern for practicalities – and together with

¹ The birth of EAC is described more fully in my paper *The Europae Archaeologia Consilium*, in the publication W.J.H. Willems (ed.), *Challenges for European Archaeology*, Zoetermeer 2000.

Peter Chowne taking care of finances in sometimes mysterious English ways, I remember heated but always amiable and inspiring board meetings, usually in Paris where for some time Alain Schnapp continued to succeed in finding some financial support. But money was getting ever more tight, and lots of time and energy went into the problems with the Journal of European Archaeology, finally relaunched in 1998 as the European Journal of Archaeology.

In that same year, during his second term as president, Kristian who had meanwhile left Denmark for a Professorship in Göteborg Sweden, decided it was time to retire before he ran out of steam. At that very same time, Peter Chowne changed jobs and had to resign as Treasurer which for the sake of continuity made it almost inevitable for me to take over the Presidency. I was elected without even an opponent but fortunately – after completing that last year of Kristian's term – I was reelected in a proper election. Elisabeth Jerem had meanwhile become the Vice-President, and found suitable accommodation for Board meetings in the guest house of the Academy of Sciences in Budapest, high above the city on the hill of Buda. At first, these were not only beautiful, but very economical indeed. I remember, after my first visit, presenting my expense claim to the travel office in the Ministry. The guy looked at the Hungarian bill from the Academy, made a calculation, looked incredulously at me and asked "Have you been sleeping under the bridge, sir?". For the EAA, such favourable prices were of course of vital importance as many Board members are not supported by their organisation.

I remain eternally grateful for the stroke of genius that caused our Swedish colleagues to think of Cecilia Åqvist as a suitable replacement for Peter Chowne as Treasurer. One of the very few archaeologists I have ever met with a real knack for figures. Together with Arek Marciniak, who had been part of the Steering Committee and was now elected Secretary, we set out on the task to make EAA more robust and reliable organisationally. That was not an easy task, but I think we largely succeeded: a conference manual was created, a structure of guidelines and regulations put in place, and an efficient website provided. We also had the good fortune that, in 1999, Tim Darvill succeeded in making Bournemouth the site of the first really big EAA meeting with well over a thousand delegates and a subsequent increase in membership. For me, personally, the conference rather than the journal has always been the heart and soul of the EAA because that is where people really meet and discuss and where creative ideas and

approaches surface. Big conferences create not only the quantity that the EAA needs to survive, but also more quantity always produces more quality. Admittedly, they generate more bullshit as well, but one learns to avoid certain sessions and besides, who cares after a great annual party and a wonderful annual dinner...?

I should not forget to mention that the Swedish commitment to EAA made it possible to move the Secretariat from the Museum of London offices in London to the Riksantikvarieämbetet branch office in Kungsbacka. The Museum of London was fully prepared to let us stay, but when Natasha Morgan left the Secretariat, it was more practical to move. That brought Petra Nordin to the EAA, who has been the administrative force that kept the board in line, strong-headed, with humour and an unparalleled workaholic. When Elin Dalen was elected to the Board, a formidable Nordic trio came into being that may well have fuelled rumours about the EAA being an Anglo-Nordic conspiracy anyway. I remember one time I was away from home my wife phoned to ask how I was doing, and I had to admit to at that very moment sitting in my bedroom with three Scandinavian ladies, sharing a bottle of whatever it was. Fortunately, I could explain away the bedroom part by the fact that I was the one that needed to smoke as well....

Being part of archaeology at the European level in this way for more than a decade and a half has been a great deal of work but also a very rewarding experience in many ways. I have tried also to convey a sense of how much fun it was. The EAA is now well out of diapers and has reached adolescence. Its role and importance for archaeology itself are unquestionable, but it needs to develop further its political role on the European scene, difficult as that may be. I have experienced those difficulties, but I hope to be around to see the current board, and its successors, make real progress there.



Willem Willems (President 1998-2003) at the ABM in Saint Petersburg 2003.