



Houses and Housing culture between climatic and social challenges in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

16 May 2013

MCH research seminar, 15.15-18.00 Auditorium 5

Chair: Mette Svart Kristiansen

15.15-15.25: *Welcome*

Research Programme Director Prof. Helle Vandkilde

Houses, climate, culture, and consciousness. Introduction

Mette Svart Kristiansen (Aarhus University)

15.25-15.45: *Medieval and Post-Medieval Alpine Cabins in the Dachstein Region, Upper Austria: Indicators for climatic Adaptions in the high alpine Environment?*

Thomas Kühtreiber (University of Salzburg)

Human acting is embedded in two spheres: „Nature“ as the ecosphere, in which humans are integrated as biological creatures, and „culture“ as the sociosphere, which is product as well as process of human interactions. Following Sieferle (1996) human populations are the mediators between both sphere by transforming ecofacts into artefacts and by transforming the physical world by cultural bound perception and imagination. Thus houses and settlements bear informations from both spheres, which gives us the chance to interpret these features as crucial elements of world perception and time bound attempts to face biological and social needs. Referring to housing in

the context of climatic challenges it makes sense to look at settlement patterns in exposed areas like high alpine regions. Since the 1980's archaeological research has been undertaking alpine cabins in the Dachstein region in Austria. First evidence for alpine transhumance and livestock breeding can be observed from the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age. The medieval and post medieval structures used for temporal pasture in the summer months are situated in small groups between 1400 and 1700 Meters above sea level and show a differentiation in ground plan and construction techniques. These aspects will be discussed under the aspect of climatic changes including alternative explanations, too.

15.45-16.05: *Living with the Risk of Avalanches and Storms. Weather, Climate, and House Building Techniques in the Alps (15th-18th century)*
Christian Rohr (University of Bern)

Alpine societies always had to face specific weather conditions, including extreme storms, snow and avalanches, and also local, but destructive floods after heavy thunderstorms. Nevertheless, the Alpine valleys had always been inhabited in the Middle Ages and in Early Modern Times up to a relatively high altitude above sea level; in some cases the permanent settlements were situated even higher than the tree line. At least from the Late Middle Ages onwards, specific building techniques can be found: The roofs were weighted with heavy stones, and in Switzerland the so-called Ebenhöch houses were established, enabling the people and their cattle to survive even when the houses were hit by avalanches.

16.05-16.15 coffee

16.15-16.35: *Living at the edge: Norse settlers and climatic adaption in Greenland*
Mogens Skaaning Høegsberg (Aarhus University)

With the exception of the short-lived seasonal settlements in North America, the Norse settlements in Greenland, which existed from circa 1000-1450 AD, not only represented the westernmost outpost of medieval European culture, but also one of the most marginal ones in terms of the Arctic natural environment. This presentation presents a view of one of the Norse Greenlandic house types as essentially one of adaptation to the climatic conditions of Greenland and considers topographic evidence as well as dating evidence in relation to the onset of the Little Ice Age.

16.35-16.45 Discussion

16.35-16.55: *A building archaeological perspective on energy efficiency and comfort in early modern buildings*
Gunhild Erikdotter (Gotland University)

My paper will discuss some of the preliminary results from a project involved with how a historical climate change like the Little Ice Age (c.1400-1900) affected indoor climate and habitability. From two Swedish case studies, I will discuss future

possibilities as well as some methodological considerations concerning interpretations of energy efficiency and comfort in the past.

16.55-17.15: *Outside cold – inside warm. House and heating between the so-called Medieval Optimum and the Little Ice Age*

Rainer Atzbach ((Aarhus University)

From the 12th until the 18th century, the climate apparently underwent deep changes in Europe. The paper seeks to explore a relationship between this development and the process of alterations in heating technique, wall structure and ground plan disposition between Alps and North Sea.

17.15-17.35 Discussion

17.35-17.55 *Buildings, climate and dendrology.*

Thomas Eissing/ Niels Bonde

17.55-18.00: Closing discussion