

Call for Papers, Deadline: December 10, 2023

Fight or Flight: The archaeology of space, mobility, and violence

International conference

April 24–26, 2024

Topic

At the latest since early 2020 the ontological security of the Global North has been significantly disrupted, as a pandemic has been added to the pending insecurity caused by global warming, epidemics, socio-political radicalization, and wars. It seems that a shared sense of instability and fear has become a new zeitgeist, bringing questions about the potentially violent “human nature” and its historical roots back on the agenda of human sciences, and particularly ancient studies. Therefore, topics of crises, especially conflict and warfare, are resumed with all the more attention and new questions. The relative abundance of corresponding evidence might give the impression that violence and aggression have always been the norm of human behavior, and that their potential absence is due to adequate protection and the threat of retaliation. Such a neo-Hobbesian view of the human past has had a major impact on warfare discourse in archaeology and needs to be critically reconsidered as there is a risk of replacement of the Rousseauian image of a peaceful “noble savage” dominating previous archaeological narratives by an opposite extreme. Instead, we critique these linear historical narratives and seek to contribute to the discourse that investigates the very diverse examples of how humans dealt with conflict with a special focus on the role of space.

The international conference “Fight or Flight: The Archaeology of Space, Mobility, and Violence” held at the Freie Universität Berlin in April 2024, shifts the focus from manifestations of violence to its prevention by (past) communities. This is all the more important as conflict resolution has so far received little consideration in studies on violence in ancient studies and appears as an important desideratum in today’s discourse facing violence and suffering in daily news. In particular, we will take a look at avoidance and compartmentalization as techniques of conflict prevention by which space is (re)negotiated and spatial distance is created or maintained by human movement or its restriction. The investigation of resilient space management and social distancing, which we refer to as conflict proxemics, is still a neglected topic in the previous and current studies on resilience, crises, and conflict, thus calling for a deeper transdisciplinary investigation that considers both pre-modern and modern societies. Also studies that (re)consider spatial vastness as not necessarily space-to-avoid, but space-to-connect (i.e. that challenge established “conflict” narratives) will be welcomed.

In this context, we examine “unforced” migration – voluntary spatial relocation as a resilience strategy in the face of increasing conflict, but also avoidance of other social groups as a measure of conflict prevention. How can such strategies be studied archaeologically? And do they represent a peaceful form of conflict resolution at all? The latter is in considerable doubt against the background of current refugee migration due to war and political terror, which takes place out of necessity of life or displacement. The other focus is active forms of spatial segregation and limitation of movement. We take a look at fences, enclosures, and buffer zones as means of separation and conflict prevention. In this context, we consider territoriality as a social practice and its role in the non/emergence of conflicts.

Sessions – the sessions will cover following key topics:

1.) Dislocation – physical movement between freedom and external coercion.

In this topic, we critically examine the question of spatial mobility as a means of conflict resolution or as a consequence of conflicts and agencies of those involved.

2.) Along borders and frontiers – encounters and spatial conflicts. Here, we explore the question of how different social entities shape contacts and negotiate space, and what role territorial thinking plays in this process.

3.) Closing off, fencing, aggregating – active avoidance between precaution and protection against acute danger. With this topic we address practices that attempt to avoid encounters through spatial segregation and the creation of limiting structures. We examine the material (fences) and non-material (buffer zones) limits on the one hand and aggregation of people in demarcated spaces on the other hand and critically approach their peacemaking and violence potential.

Intended speakers

In addition to experts in ancient studies, we invite scholars from the fields of human geography, anthropology, and sociology to consider the outlined topics from different perspectives and to create synergy effects. Furthermore, we welcome input from outside of academia by people who are involved in refugee aid and asylum processes or who experienced (forced) migration themselves.

We kindly ask all interested scholars to send their proposals (300 words) and a short CV to ilia.heit@dainst.de by **10 December 2023**.
There will be the possibility of financial support for travel expenses.

Concept and organization

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This conference is part of the BAK Annual theme 2023/24 “Conflicts and how to deal with them”,
for more information please visit:

https://www.berliner-antike-kolleg.org/en/forschung/jahresthema2023_24/index.html

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