

Tagung:

**Archaeo Art History: German-Slavic Encounters in the Altmark and East of the River Elbe**

**Leipzig, Vortragsaal der Universitätsbibliothek und des GWZO**

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**Organisatoren:**

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**German-Slavic Encounters** reconsiders German-Slavic cultural interactions in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries in the wake of the Wendish Crusade of 1147 through the lens of ecclesiastical architecture, landscape archaeology, and settlement archaeology. While earlier scholarship has often framed this period as one of unilateral conquest—emphasizing German expansion into pagan Slavic territories and the imposition of Christian institutions—recent archaeological evidence and shifting methodological paradigms challenge this narrative. What emerges instead is a more complex picture of coexistence, contact, and mutual transformation across an evolving frontier. Through the study of architecture, archaeological finds, as well as textual sources, the conference aims to reconsider long-standing of supposed German colonialism by reexamining the material history.

The region surrounding the northern middle Elbe River saw dramatic changes in its settlement patterns and built environment starting in the second half of the twelfth into the beginning of the thirteenth century, with a large number of village churches and several monastic foundations. Despite its place as a unique cultural landscape with one of the highest concentrations of Romanesque ecclesiastical buildings (ca. 250 extant Romanesque churches), the region remains largely absent from the art historical canon. The erection of Romanesque fieldstone and brick churches is typically cited in historical literature as the most visible expressions of German cultural and religious dominance, suggesting an absolute takeover of Germanic building practices. Many of these new churches had historically-recorded predecessor buildings of which nothing is known to date. However, the issue of how Germans and Slavs coexisted is largely up for debate. The narrative according to which Germans conquered the pagan Slavs and then asserted their dominance through population exchange, cultural supplanting, and the erection of Christian monasteries is complicated by the many Slavic communities we know had long adopted Christianity (before the arrival of Germans), that there are German and Slavic place names on either side of the Elbe, and that frequently Slavic material culture survived and continued to be produced long into the German phase, raising the question of whether material culture can be reliably or meaningfully assigned to fixed ethnic categories.

The stakes of the conference are both historiographical and disciplinary. Drawing inspiration from frontier studies as developed by scholars such as Robert Bartlett and Nora Berend, we seek to mobilize the tools of art history to interrogate how buildings, sites, and ecologies functioned as contact zones. At the same time, we turn to settlement archaeology and archaeogenetics to access forms of evidence and historical texture that traditional textual sources do not capture: habitation patterns, tools, ceramics, and microecological change. Our aim is to explore what becomes possible when archaeologists, historians, and art historians build on each other's findings to rethink German-Slavic relations not as a simple binary of domination and resistance, but as a multi-scalar, negotiated process.