

## **Conference summary**

### ***The very beginnings of Europe? Cultural and Social Dimensions of Early-Medieval Migration and Colonisation (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century)***

**International Conference, VIOE & ACE,  
Brussels - May 17-19 2011**

#### **Migration as the fundamental motive for society**

From 2007 till 2012, the project 'Archaeology in Contemporary Europe' (ACE) is being supported by the Culture Programme of the European Commission and coordinated by the French Institut national de recherches archéologiques préventives (Inrap). Together with 13 partners, the Flemish Heritage Institute (VIOE, Belgium) aims to promote contemporary archaeology on a European level by highlighting the cultural, scientific and economical means of archaeological activities.

In the framework of theme I 'Significance of the past', all partners collect information and broaden their knowledge about certain aspects of human activity in the past. Furthermore, they seek to examine how this information and knowledge are being absorbed by society.

The archaeological investigation carried out by VIOE on the early medieval cemetery in Broechem, offers a wealth of scientific information about the early medieval human and his environment. As a consequence, the focus of the international colloquium '*The very beginning of Europe? Cultural and Social Dimensions of Early-Medieval Migration and Colonisation (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century)*' was put on two of the most important aspects and subjects for debate of the investigation into this quite unknown period: migration and colonization. From the 17<sup>th</sup> till the 19<sup>th</sup> of May, 24 international speakers and 120 participants exchanged their ideas about several social questions and phenomena of early medieval societies: elite, identity and landscape, identity and urban centers, cemeteries and material culture. Methods and techniques were also part of the program.

Some speakers demonstrated connections with the contemporary society and its evolutions. Professor Guy Halsall from the University of York (UK) pleaded in his key-note lecture for a

new, modern approach of the investigation into early medieval migration. Leo Lucassen, professor social history in the University of Leiden (Netherlands) and expert in the Dutch policy on migration, also gave his opinion during an evening lecture.

According to Lucassen, we should look at the social role and function of migration in a wider context. In order to create an overall picture and open the biased (political) opinion, he would like to involve into the current migration debate other scientific disciplines like history, anthropology and historical linguistics. Even in earlier times, mobility was a prime reason for contact between people from different tribes and cultures. These contacts resulted in exchange of knowledge, habits, insights, etc. Lucassen consequently means that migration lays the foundation of many innovations and is the engine of social change. In short, without migration a society cannot evolve.

Pictures:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/vioe/5736464414/in/photostream/>