

The Mesolithic in the Austrian Danube Corridor

Searching for a new site in Upper Austria

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Introduction

The Mesolithic period is among the most unexplored phases in the archaeological research of Austria, particularly in the Danube Corridor. Since the 1990s only few papers of Mesolithic sites in these areas based on excavations of the 1950s/60s and collectors' material were published (e.g. Gulder 1953; Anti-Weiser 1986; Nutz 2006).

A further complicating matter is the fact that the so-called Beuronian – whereof the Austrian Mesolithic is said to be a part of – has been defined differently in different areas since the 1970s (e.g. Rozoy 1967; Taute 1971; Kozłowski 1984, 2009), making direct comparisons of Mesolithic artefacts between sites in Bavaria, the Czech Republic, Austria or Hungary rather difficult.

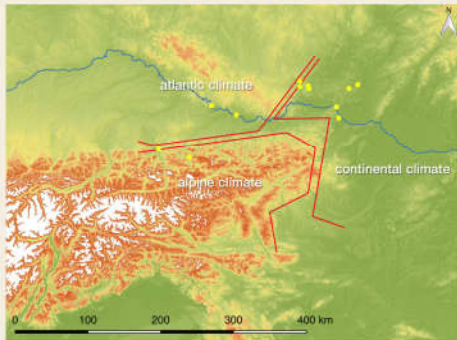


Fig. 1: 14 Mesolithic sites in the Austrian Danube Corridor including recent climate boundaries (red lines; based on ZAMG, ÖKLIM, CGIAR-CSI): Aschach an der Donau (Upper Austria), Bad Ischl (Upper Austria), Gusen „Berglitzl“ (Upper Austria), Limberg (Lower Austria), Kamegg (Lower Austria), Stranitzberg (Lower Austria), Mühlfeld (Lower Austria), Horn-Galgenberg (Lower Austria), Burgschleinitz (Lower Austria), Bisamberg (Lower Austria), Ebendorf (Lower Austria), Rainberg (Lower Austria), Brunn II (Vienna), Zigeunerhöhle of Elsbethen (Salzburg) (as at March 2018).



Fig. 2: View from the site of Aschach an der Donau towards east onto the Danube (Photo: D. Schuh).

Methods and Materials

The aim of this PhD project is thus to gain a clearer picture of the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers in the Austrian Danube corridor as well as their relation to neighboring groups by analyzing data on lithic raw material, technology and typology and to work out a comprehensive overview of the archaeological record of this period.



Fig. 3: Excavation in Aschach an der Donau in the area of a vegetable garden (Photo: D. Schuh).

Additionally, data on faunal remains, palynological archives and other environmental and paleoclimate data are compiled to assess the role of the environment, particularly the effects of the environment, particularly the effects of the environmental conditions especially on the border of the rather arid Weinviertel and the rather humid Waldviertel in the Kamptal, where both climate conditions collide. These conditions, which presumably have impacts on the network structure of Mesolithic hunter-gatherer groups, will be analyzed with GIS and ecological models to reconstruct the Mesolithic environment and interactions of climate, ecosystems and social behavior.



Fig. 4: Overview of the excavation area in Aschach an der Donau (Photo: D. Schuh).

A new Mesolithic site? - Aschach an der Donau, Upper Austria

Two Austrian collectors found lithic artifacts in the district of Aschach an der Donau in Upper Austria. After discovering an early Mesolithic element in the materials of Aschach an der Donau, a first sondage was immediately planned. This was the first step in finding a new Mesolithic site in Austria. Thus in a one week campaign in September 2018 the Institute of Prehistory in Erlangen and the Landschaftsverein Donauschlinge excavated eight sondages at the presumably Mesolithic site to find an intact Mesolithic layer.

The existence of such a Mesolithic layer is very rare in most parts of central Europe. Due to the long-term agricultural use of the field on which the excavation took place, intact layers could only be found close to some old pear trees.

More than 800 finds were recovered, mainly consisting of lithics, bones and ceramics. To figure out whether it is a concrete Mesolithic layer, the complete area around the pear trees has to be excavated and the lithics have to be analyzed. This will take place in 2019. In addition to that the lithics and other finds from old excavations in Austria, which are presumably Mesolithic, will also be analyzed. Most of them are kept in the Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum Linz.



Fig. 5: Overview of raw materials from Aschach an der Donau.

Conclusion

During the last years several research projects concerning the Mesolithic have been conducted or started in different regions of Central Europe. In the Czech Republic and Southern Germany (especially Bavaria), for instance, the picture of Mesolithic hunter-gatherer lifeways has become much clearer (Graf 2015; Richter 2017). Along with the new site in Aschach an der Donau these advances in Mesolithic research offer a good opportunity to reconsider the situation in the Austrian Danube corridor and to reevaluate the chronological and chorological structuring of the Mesolithic record in this area of Central Europe.

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