

Chronology, networks, society – the Münchshöfen culture at the enclosure site of Riedling, Lower Bavaria

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The Lower Bavarian Münchshöfen culture (c. 4500–3900 cal BC) sits at the crossroads between eastern and western European Neolithic traditions. It is famous for its lavish pottery, with shapes and decoration indicating long-distance contacts. Similarly, as in other neighbouring culture groups, enclosures are built in large numbers, and there is an increase in carefully placed deposits involving humans, animals and objects. Yet strangely, the area remains excluded from networks involving copper or Alpine jade axes. All this makes an interesting test case in the selective transfer of new objects and practices – what was (not) taken up, and why? And what are the social implications of these patterns?

Unfortunately, the chronology of the area remains inadequately understood (at least in absolute terms) and few assemblages are comprehensively published. This means that it is still difficult to address the character and extent of outside influences, the speed at which innovations were adopted, or their wider social context.

This project will address these questions starting from one particularly promising enclosure site, that of Riedling (Straubing, Bavaria). This site was chosen because it was excavated very recently (by the ArcTron/ArcTeam archaeological unit) and records are therefore very good. Two enclosure ditches and the interior area were excavated, revealing many carefully placed deposits, as well as a large amount of seemingly more casually discarded material.

Overall, there are over 1500 kg of pottery and several thousand animal bones (the largest Münchshöfen assemblage known so far), alongside textile production equipment (spindle whorls, loom weights), daub, lithics, charred plant remains and around 40 burials of complete or partial human skeletons. Our main aims are to:



A sherd paving with human remains from a feature at Riedling
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- Assess the chronology of the site
- Trace the networks its inhabitants entertained to other regions, identifying both links and boundaries
- Define and interpret the differences between the early phase (many deposits of material culture) and the later phase (no more deposits in the ditch)
- On this basis, develop suggestions for how the community at Riedling was structured, how it changed and how this fits into wider inter-regional trends at this time

In detail, the following studies will be carried out:

- The many complete vessels from the deliberate deposits will help in constructing a chronological scheme for the site, and in drawing connections to neighbouring traditions (Dr. Márton Szilágyi). These studies will be complemented by pilot work on clay characterisation (Dr. Markus Helfert) and lipid analysis (Prof. Richard Evershed).
- The stratigraphic relations between features provide a good basis for the statistical study of radiocarbon dates (Dr. Seren Griffiths), which will complement the typochronology.
- An analysis of the lithic material (Dr. Nicole Kegler-Graiewski) will provide information on the position of the site in exchange networks.
- The human remains will be analysed for age, sex and health status, paying particular attention to differences between the more 'regular' burials and fragmentary remains (Prof. Gisela Grupe).
- The animal bones (Dr. Jörg Ewersen) and charred plant remains (Dr. Claudia Sarkady) will provide first insights into the site's economy, another neglected aspect for the Münchshöfen culture.
- A comparative analysis of the structured deposits will also be carried out, alongside student projects on other aspects of the material.

For a brief German summary of the project, see the DFG website:

<http://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/282751946>

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Further reading:

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Husty, L. and Meixner, G. 2009. Ein neues Münchshöfener Grabenwerk in Riedling, Gde. Oberschneiding, Lkr. Straubing-Bogen. In K. Schmotz (ed.), *Vorträge des 27. Niederbayerischen Archäologentages*, 29-63. Rahden: Leidorf.

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