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Galgenberg-Stratzing/Krems-Rehberg and its 32,000 years old female statuette

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Zusammenfassung

Nach einer Charakterisierung der geographischen Lage der Fundstelle am Galgenberg bei Stratzing gibt der Artikel Einblick in die Strukturen und die Datierung des Fundplatzes. Es werden besonders die Feuerstellen mit Steinumrandungen und die Statuette beschrieben. Refitting Ergebnisse belegen die Gleichzeitigkeit von zumindest fünf Feuerstellen. Die Tierknochen erlauben Aussagen bezüglich der jahreszeitlichen Nutzung und der Jagdstrategien.

Summary

After characterizing the geographic situation of the Galgenberg site near Stratzing the article gives an insight into the structures and the dating of the archaeological layers. Especially the hearths with stone structures and the statuette are described. First results of refitting evidence the contemporaneity of at least 5 hearths. The choice of animal bones allows comments concerning seasonality and hunting strategies.

Keywords: Aurignacian, female figurine, hearths, refitting, seasonality

In 1985 the Bundesdenkmalamt was informed that an excavator had already cut through charcoal horizons during earthworks for a high-level tank of the Krems waterworks. Stones and bone fragments had been collected. J. W. Neugebauer immediately initiated a rescue excavation which gave first insights into the stratigraphy and the high density of finds at the Galgenberg. From 1986 the author carried out excavations on behalf of the Bundesdenkmalamt. In 1988, during one of the excavation campaigns which ran from 5 to 9 weeks every year the famous statuette was found (NEUGEBAUER-MARESCH 1987, 73-84; NEUGEBAUER-MARESCH 1989, 551-559, NEUGEBAUER-MARESCH 1990, 3-13).

The site

The topography of the Galgenberg is characterized by its position at the border between the Tullnerfeld in the East and the Wachau in the Southwest. Geologically it is located at the transition of the Bohemian Massif in the West to the Molasse Zone in the East. Tertiary gravels occur at the base of this elevation which partly covered by 13 m high loess deposits.

The Galgenberg lies 374 m above sea level. The cultural layers extend over the eastern part of the ridge and especially over the northern slope with the Stratzingbrook at its foot. Towards the east a view far into the Danube valley is given and in the West a cut is leading to the Krems valley.

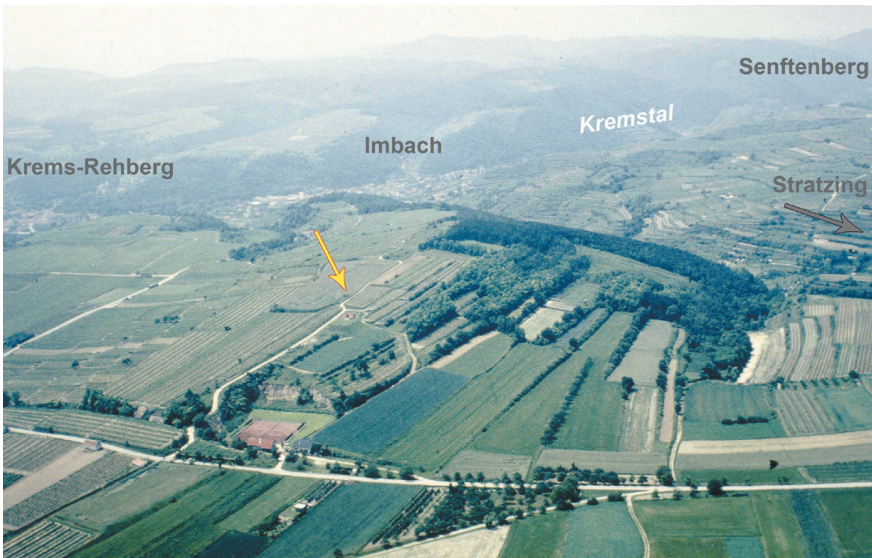


Fig. 1: Stratzing-Galgenberg, from Northeast (photograph E. Wallner)

Stratigraphy and structures

In an area of 1,200 square metres excavated so far three cultural layers dating from 46,000 to 29,000 y BP could be located (NEUGEBAUER-MARESCH 1993, 10-19, NEUGEBAUER-MARESCH 1996, 67-79, NEUGEBAUER-MARESCH 1995, 14-25, NEUGEBAUER-MARESCH 1996, 97-103). They are situated above a mighty red pa-

laeosoil which can also be seen in the wall of the former brickworks in the east. The layers descend to the northeast with a larger inclination than the present-day slope. In situ structures could only be found at the ridge. On the northern slope solifluction could be observed which not only led to a re-deposition of the finds and structures but were also noticed above the cultural layers in form of up to five small horizons. Trenches on the southern slope showed that massive erosion processes must have destroyed eventual cultural layers in this place. In the course of a diploma thesis at the Institute of Geography of Vienna University these processes were demonstrated and it was attempted to reconstruct the palaeorelief (KRAMMER 2005).

Pollen analysis provided evidence for the occurrence of coniferous trees like pine and larch, different sorts of grass and herbs which are typical for the loess steppe. The palaeosoil of the lowest layer also contained pollen of ferns and spores of moss as well as evidence of deciduous trees like birch and alder.



Fig. 2: Stratzing/Krems-Rehberg, profile M42 (2000). 1-3 are the archaeological layers (photograph PK OEAW)

During the excavation of that layer three cavities with a marginal cover of small plates of lime in some places were observed. Under the microscope it became evident that the traces of lime came from wood. One of these cavities with a regular slightly oval diameter of about 2 cm was at least 130 cm long. As this piece showed no ramifications the question arose, whether this could be an artificially modified piece of wood, perhaps a spear. Similar evidence has been stated during the excavation campaigns at Krems-Hundsteig from 2000 to 2002.

Dating

A series of radiocarbon datings made in Vienna (VERA), Groningen (GrN), Zurich (ETH) and Cologne (KN) dated the layers 1 and 2 to 32,000 - 29,000 y BP. In areas with in situ structures the data are consistent whereas in slope positions the data scatter between 32,000 and 26,000 y BP which shows contaminations and re-depositions.

The dates for layer 3 are older than 40,000 y BP therefore assigning the layer to the Middle Palaeolithic. As this layer could only be excavated in very restricted areas we have only a few uncharacteristic finds from this horizon.

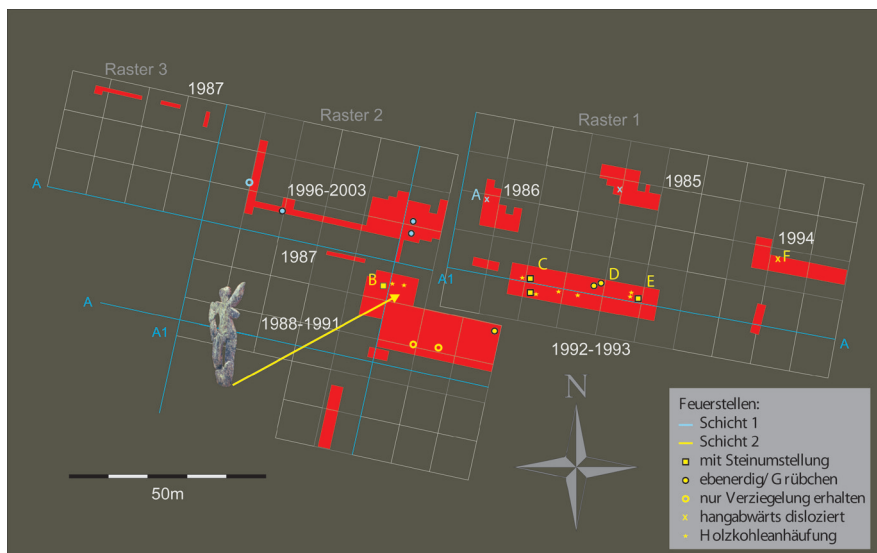


Fig. 3: Stratzing/Krems-Rehberg, plan of the excavation area with hearths (graphic Ch. Neugebauer-Maresch, PK OEAW)

Hearths

Altogether six hearths in layer 1, eleven hearths in layer 2 and eight further charcoal concentrations have been unearthed. The most marked ones are those surrounded by stones for reflecting the heat. Hearths B and F are characterized by almost complete stone encirclements. The double hearth C only showed a partial stone circle. There are also examples of hearths without stone circles which are approximately 75 cm in diameter possibly built in a slight depression with traces of firing at the bottom and charcoal on the surface. In some cases there are only round places with traces of firing left while the cultural layer was already replaced eroded. The original type of these hearths can therefore not be reconstructed.

The inhabitants of the Galgenberg used larch and pine for firing. They mostly fired fresh boughs and seldom old wood was collected. Wood from larch and pine must have been rather abundant.



Fig. 4: Stratzing/Krems-Rehberg, hearth C (1992/93) with stone encirclement and cooking pit (photograph Ch. Neugebauer-Maresch, BDA)



Fig. 5: Stratzing/Krems-Rehberg, hearth B (1989) with stone encirclement and red burnt sediment (photograph Ch. Neugebauer-Maresch, BDA)

Hearth B and the statuette

With a diameter of 1m this hearth exceeded the others in size by far and formed the centre of a find concentration sized 5 by 5 m. On the periphery of this concentration the statuette was found in 1988. It was remarkable that within the stone circle there was no charcoal at all whereas the sediment was reddened by firing to a depth of 30 cm. The repeated dispersion of charcoal was observed on various places in the surrounding. Thus the long time use of this hearth is certain.

The fragments of the statuette were found on the eastern periphery of a relatively dense and up to 30 cm thick find scatter sized 5 by 2 m ending with a relatively sharp border. In this area there were five small pits in a row at right angles to the inclination of the slope. One of them was situated directly at the the hearth



Fig. 6: Stratzing/Krems-Rehberg, statuette from the Galgenberg (photograph A. Schumacher)

and was secondarily filled with stone debris and bone fragments, which points to a use as cooking pit. It was further remarkable that the spectrum of stone tools consisted primarily of burins and burin spalls. Many of them could be refitted.

It is highly probable that the statuette was manufactured at the Galgenberg. The occurrence of amphibolite schist in a distance of several hundred metres from the site, as well as many small fragments of this raw material in the area of the fragments of statuette, which may be waist from carving support the above mentioned assumption. The statuette itself is an upright standing figurine without feet, one leg in close touch to the other. The legs are separated by a pointed oval perforation. The left leg seems stretched while the right one is flexed. The transition from the hips to the upper part of the body is rounded which can especially be seen from the back side. The right arm is also separated from the body by a pointed oval perforation and touches the thigh. A rod like object along the leg appears in outlines. Two projections on the left hand side can be interpreted as raised arm and the left breast in profile. The head is slightly inclined to the right. Four notches visible at an oblique view on the same side as the raised arm may indicate the main view of the head – the face which is not further modelled. The clearly pronounced right shoulder makes the lack of the left shoulder especially clear. The anatomic explanation is clear: When the arm is raised the shoulder disappears building a “v” with the line of the body from the neck and the head. This posture is strengthened by the head turned in this direction with a view slightly turned upwards (NEUGEBAUER-MARESCH 1995, 187-194, NEUGEBAUER-MARESCH 2005, 145-156, Fig. 1-4).

Stone tools (MAYER, in prep.)

People from the Galgenberg collected nodules for the tool production in the gravels of the Galgenberg itself as well as in the river beds of the Danube and the Krems. Raw materials of low quality are abundant in big quantity. An essential part of the finer tools however is made of white patinated flint presumably imported from the area of the Czech Republic.

Attempts to refit stone material from various hearths furnish surprising results: 1000 pieces out of 6000 could be refitted. This high percentage alone lets us presume excellent conditions of preservation. Most important for the evidence of a big camp site occupying a large area is the successful refitting which connects 5 different hearths of layer 2 located more than 90 m apart.

From the typological point of view layers 1 and 2 can be distinguished by dif-

ferent amounts of burins and endscrapers. The upper layer 1 contains a bigger amount of endscrapers. Burins and burin spalls are spread unequally but are less frequent than in layer 2 where particularly at hearth B and the double hearth C there is a high percentage of burins and a far smaller amount of endscrapers. Scrapers and burins can also be found as double tools.

Palaeontology

Unfortunately the fauna is only poorly represented at this site. To a great extent this can be explained by the bad preservation conditions. The numbers of horse teeth or burned bones which are more robust provide evidence for this sumption. Remains of wild horse, reindeer, mammoth, deer and woolly rhino could be determined; the bones of smaller animals fell a victim to the poor preservation conditions (NIEDERHUBER 1997). Among the most remarkable finds is a pelvis (both parts of the pelvis combined with the sacrum) of a woolly rhino deposited in anatomic association and found in the north-western part of the excavation area in 1987. In connection with a small fragment of a blade lying close to the bones we suppose that these are remains of the prey. Near hearth A we found the antlers of a reindeer still joined to a fragment of the cranium (FLADERER 1997). It belonged to an animal which was just about to shed its antlers. It is interpreted as a male reindeer which had been killed in autumn. Further arguments for this interpretation are the remains of a juvenile reindeer without points of antler as well as the remains of a metapodium which was fragmented for the extraction of marrow.

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