

3RD FLOOR

ENGLISH

SELECTED

EXHIBITION TEXTS



MAMUZ

SCHLOSS ASPARN/ZAYA

TEXT 01

Living space

People settle in Lower Austria around 70,000 years ago – and still live here today

During the last Ice Age there is a thick ice sheet over the Alps and what is today Scandinavia. In between there are ice-free areas where plants, animals and people live. They are exposed to great climatic fluctuations.

Forests spread out in sections with a moderate climate, in cold periods only sparse tundra vegetation can survive. In Lower Austria the people find animals they can hunt such as mammoths, woolly rhinoceroses, reindeer, wild horses and cave bears.

They look for shelter in caves and build tent-like dwellings on open ground or under rock shelters.

They turn these places into their homes and use the conditions they encounter to help them survive. And they explore new ground and expand their knowledge. Their experiences survive thanks to communication and the fact they are passed on from one generation to the next.

Today we come across the traces of their long-gone everyday lives. Their tools, weapons, jewellery and graves make us witnesses to a life which – like today – also includes joy and sorrow. The mourning of the death of two babies can be seen in the respectful way they are buried. This is contrasted with the puzzle of some hundred people who were violently killed and seemingly carelessly buried.

It is not only caves that offer a protective roof over people's heads. From the very start, people use the resources they have available and cultivate these. As well as living in caves, they also build stable huts on open land. In the Neolithic Age large wooden houses are then erected for the first time, the first animals are bred and grain is cultivated.

Today we can only try to guess what was going on in people's minds. The huge circular enclosures, whose function is not apparent for us today, give us some evidence. Are they meeting places aligned with the stars, a type of temple, or in fact functional buildings?

Agriculture and domestication signify a great achievement for the human race. Around 5,500 B.C. humans reach Central Europe and spread out slowly and continuously. Sedentism, stable and durable house building and also ceramic production therefore become established.

People seem to have had the need for artistic expression for tens of thousands of years. But today we do not know the significance and role of the objects which we interpret as art.

The art of survival, the art of dealing with the conditions prevailing at the time, of using and developing them – these are the pillars we are standing on today.

We are building on these.

TEXT 02

The dead children of Wachtberg

Traces of daily survival and a tragedy in the Palaeolithic Age

In the Wachtberg area of Krems under a 5 m thick loess layer there is a Palaeolithic camp ground which has been explored since 2005. Fire pits, many stone tools, remains of hunted animals such as mammoths, reindeer, red deer, wild horses, bears, wolves, foxes, wolverines, hares and various birds are evidence of this. Around a camp ground with a particularly large amount of fire debris there are small holes in the loess which are interpreted as “drip holes” of a shelter, probably roofing for the fire pit.

Not far from this presumed dwelling, in a pit 40 cm deep, is a Stone Age tragedy. Two newborns, both lying on their left side with legs slightly bent and both facing towards the east, are buried there. A chain made of ivory pendants is near the pelvis of one baby. They are both sprinkled with a thick layer of redde and maybe wrapped in a hide. A thick mammoth shoulder blade is positioned so that it covers both dead children well. To make sure the bone lies horizontally over both children, a treated ivory fragment is put underneath on one side.

Just 1 m to the side of the grave of the two newborns, researchers discover another grave of a baby who was around three months old. This time there is no cover or protection for the dead child. The baby was probably wrapped in a hide closed with an ivory needle, however. The needle is approximately 2 cm above the child's head.

The infant mortality rate is high in the Stone Age, the living conditions hard. Death is no doubt a tragic event for the people of the Palaeolithic Age too. The coping strategies seem to be similar to today.

Even if science will not find any answers to many questions, the picture we have in our heads of the people in the Palaeolithic Age is richer if we can add the aspect of loving care.

TEXT 03

Palaeolithic art: tools, music, jewellery

Homo sapiens give their environment an artistic design. Instead of a universal tool for various activities, modern humans develop special equipment in the Upper Palaeolithic Period around 27,000 years ago.

In addition to stone, they also use antlers, bones and ivory for the first time.

They paint their everyday objects and maybe also their bodies with red ochre. They use the bones of killed animals to make beads for chains or as trimming for their clothing. The right shin bone of a reindeer is used to make a musical instrument. This Ice Age flute is considered an outstanding special item.

The famous cave paintings from Southern France and Spain also come from this period. To us they seem like freeze frames from films which offer a lot of scope for interpretation. In our region this type of artistic or spiritual mode of expression is missing.

TEXT 04

Venus of Willendorf

The Venus of Willendorf, 27,000 years old,
and the Venus of Stratzing, 32,000 years old

Found by chance in 1908 while building a railway, the 27,000-year-old Venus of Willendorf has since become world famous. The Venus of Stratzing, which goes back 32,000 years, is also known throughout the world. The interpretations of the female figurines from the Ice Age are disputed and varied.

Between Siberia and France, a large number of figurines have been discovered in the last two centuries. They are of either gender, have various body shapes and were made around 30,000 – 10,000 years ago.

As ideals of beauty, artistic expression in the Ice Age and as goddesses of fertility, the plump statuettes are usually seen as evidence of Stone Age matriarchal rule. The slim Venus of Stratzing, the oldest female figurine to date, is interpreted as a dancing woman because of her posture. Whom or what do they represent? Who created them and for what purpose?

We would only be too pleased to discover their secret.

TEXT 05

Survival – changing environmental conditions

The end of the Ice Age marks the beginning of the Mesolithic Age

The climate warming around 12,000 years ago causes the

glaciers to melt and leads to the end of our last ice age, the Würm glacial stage.

The rising temperature also affects the flora and fauna. Forests now appear gradually in place of the tundra vegetation. First of all birch and pine, then hazel, spruce, oak, alder and elm, and later lime and fir.

Ice Age animals, such as the mammoth and the woolly rhinoceros, die out, and others such as reindeer, musk oxen and ibexes move back into cooler regions. Instead of these, wisent, aurochs, elk, red deer, roe deer and wild boar spread.

For humans, settlement areas now open up which were covered in ice until then. Some follow the herds of reindeer to the north, other groups adapt to the new conditions. The hunting methods change – instead of drive hunting large herds, individual animals are now pursued in the forests.

The flint flakes are now tiny little flint blades. This period is mainly understood by its typical tools. The beginning varies from region to region, depending on the settlement of the ice-free areas by the Mesolithic people.

TEXT 06

Mesolithic art: tools

Microliths are the name of the tiny little flakes of the Mesolithic Age

Inserted on wooden or bone shafts, they become sickles, knives, saws. Birch bark is made into glue used to secure the inserted parts – only millimetres in size – in place. To make such tiny little flint flakes is a skill typical of the Mesolithic Age around 12,000 years ago.

The find spot at Bisamberg is one of the few proven habitats of the Mesolithic Age.

TEXT 07

Survival – agriculture and livestock breeding

The wild varieties of early grain cultivation come from the Middle East

It is certain that the cereals in Central Europe are not native to the area. The farming-based lifestyle with deliberate sowing and harvesting already develops in the Middle East around 9,000 B.C. Gathering wild cereal grains probably constitutes the start. Gradually stockpiling leads to deliberate sowing and grain cultivation.

Around 5,500 B.C. emmer, einkorn, pea, lentil and flax are on the menu of the Neolithic Age in Central Europe. In some areas barley and opium poppy are added too.

How they came to Central Europe is a major topic among researchers.

The earliest domestic animals are the frugal and resilient sheep and goats. Their wild parents come from the Middle East and were probably initially caught as young animals.

Domestication extends over a long period. Cattle and swine follow later.

Around 5,500 B.C. livestock breeding also spreads in the villages of Central Europe.

There are many indications that cattle were used mainly as a source of meat. Sheep or goats may have been kept both for meat and also for milk.

Dogs have been a faithful companion for humans since around 20,000 B.C. In the Neolithic Age there are already different dog breeds. One of them is very close to today's Spitz.

The transition from hunting and gathering to a life as farmers goes smoothly. Both exist alongside each other for a while.

TEXT 08

Neolithic art

The Lengyel culture, colourful and imaginative

The strikingly colourful pottery

The Lengyel culture characterised a short period of the Neolithic Age, between 4,900 – 4,300 B.C.

The beginnings are multi-coloured but are dominated by red and yellow. Over time the pottery becomes more and more colourful with the colours white, pink, black and brown. Then the wide range of colours becomes smaller

again and the painting is replaced by carved decorations. But as well as the joy of colours, the imagination when it comes to vessel shapes and variants is also typical of this Neolithic period. Houses are reproduced as models made of clay, as are animal figures and human-like shapes.

These forms, with colourful painted decorative patterns, give the impression of a fine and particular feeling for art. The tools made from bone and stone are finely ground and shaped, precisely according to the requirement and function.

TEXT 09

Neolithic art: A small painted statuette from the Neolithic Age

The skin yellow, the skirt is painted on using black, genuine frets placed at an angle. The hair, black and curly too, also appears to be on the neck and chest. There is a red belt above the black skirt, under the chest a large double spiral. A small red dot on the head is also interpreted as jewellery.

The shape of the head is rather abstract, positioned on a very long neck.

Taken out of the context of its culture 6,000 years ago, it is a work of art in its form and colours. But the Neolithic world in which it was made maybe gave it complex significance.

Such statuettes of women, painted and unpainted, are

common in the Middle Neolithic Age in Lower Austria. They are usually found in settlements. The archaeological world therefore likes to assign them the character of a protective symbol for house and farm, for security. We do not know what the people of the Neolithic Age were thinking. But we can give the Venus of Falkenstein a new place in our own world today.

TEXT 10

The dead of Schletz

Skeletons in the ditch of the Neolithic village of Asparn/
Schletz

They are lying in prone position, many of the bones broken into pieces and covered in dog bite marks. All suffered a violent death, their skulls bashed in by blunt or sharp tools. The victims are mainly men, there are only a few women and children in the ditch. The traces of a drama around 7,000 years ago. Who are these dead people? Why were they killed? By whom?

The large Linear Pottery culture settlement is on a ridge between the River Zaya and the Schletz ditch. A path known from ancient times, the Totenweg (path of the dead), leads past the settlement from Asparn to Oberleis. In the Neolithic Age, two ditch systems surround the extensive area. The more recent, oval ditch has been extended and remade at least three times. Parts of it are even in duplicate and are connected by bridges of soil. Whether it was built as an attachment of the living area has not yet been discussed fully. The houses are located

inside and outside the ditch.

Inside the oval ditch an 8 m deep shaft has been dug. In the shaft a well housing made of wood in a corner timbered construction has been inserted.

In this circumferential oval ditch there are human skeletons and parts of skeletons, most of them in prone position, arms and legs stretched out and mixed up at the bottom of the ditch. There are probably more than 100 people in the ditch, and 67 of them were able to be studied in anthropological examinations.

There are hardly any women or young people among the dead. The bones of most of the dead show evidence of malnutrition.

All have fatal injuries to the skull, caused by being hit with a stone axe and a stone club. Only one person is injured by an arrow shot.

The dead must have been left unburied out in the open for a long time. Many bones have traces of animal bite marks and some limbs have been carried up to 5 m away. Are the dead former members of the village at Asparn/Schletz?

An analysis of the bones shows that they lived in the same place that they died. Trace elements absorbed in food are found in enamel and therefore give information on where the youth was spent.

Some interpretations suggest a dispute between

neighbouring population groups. The reason for the argument is not clarified, however. Was it a lack of resources and territory?

TEXT 11

Skeletons record living conditions, disease or injuries.

There is no doubt a tragedy behind the two dead people lying together in a grave. They are a man aged around 25 – 30 and a woman of about 20 years old. The man in prone position with arms crossed in front of his chest, and on top the woman also in prone position, both injured or killed by arrowheads in the back.

The man seems to have had his arms chained. Signs of wear on the cervical vertebrae, an inflammation of the right hip bone and signs of strain on the thigh indicate heavy physical activity.

The young woman, on the other hand, shows signs of heavy physical work on the upper arm bones.

They are in the middle of a so-called ring ditch, but it is very uncertain whether they were buried at the same time the ring ditch existed. The circumstances of their deaths are unknown.

These graves represent an exception for the Neolithic Age, but they do reveal a side of everyday life.

TEXT 12

Traces of life in the Neolithic Age

Traces of life in the Neolithic Age can be read on a skeleton.

The grave of a “shaman”?

Health problems caused by hard physical work, malnutrition or injuries are maybe also relieved by people with healing abilities in the Neolithic Age.

Within the double circular enclosure in Friebritz there is a small cemetery. The graves and buried skeletons reveal aspects of Middle Neolithic life. One burial is called the grave of the “shaman”. The grave goods of the dead man give rise to associations with equipment which, today, we know from so-called shamans. The 13 small clay spheres, probably remains of a rattle, the grinding board and, next to this, the equipment for grinding reddle and graphite and also a finely smoothed “spatula” mean we can take a chance on interpreting this as a “shamanic” expert from the Neolithic Age.

TEXT 13

A double ditch system surrounds Asparn/Schletz

Within two overlapping ditch systems there are several post structures, these are Linear Pottery culture longhouses.

The residential buildings follow the natural landform and

therefore have a level floor. This is why the longhouses are aligned north to south, which is not usually the case in Lower Austria. Two of at least twelve houses, with a length of 20 m and a width of 6 m, have been entirely archaeologically excavated. The village of Asparn/Schletz exists over the long period of several hundred years. The tradition of house construction is passed on over generations.

In the final phase of the settlement the surrounding ditches are apparently reinforced and extended. In addition to the naturally available springs, a well in a solid corner timbered construction provides the population with water.

The definite threat becomes manifest for us today because skeletal remains of at least a hundred people are found in one of the ditches. All have injuries to the cranial bone caused by a heavy blow. Having a roof over one's head did not provide sufficient protection.

TEXT 14

The first permanent settlements

Their houses were around 7 to 8 m wide and up to 20 m long.

Similar finds are known from places such as Mold, Schwechat and Schletz.

To build such houses required an extensive repertoire of tools.

Adzes and axes were used for chopping down, debranching and debarking trees and shaping logs into posts. With hammers made of wood or stone, pegs or treenails could be knocked into the wooden posts of the Neolithic house walls. Chisels made of bone were used to shape the natural forked branches of the freshly chopped posts for the crossbeams of the roof.

Measuring cords have knots tied at fixed distances to each other. They have survived from the Middle Ages and were used in house building to determine lengths or for measuring the correct angles. On account of the size and regular nature of the Neolithic buildings, it is assumed that simple measuring instruments were also used at the time for building houses. Corresponding cords could definitely be a possibility here.

TEXT 15

Roof over one's head

A roof over one's head provides protection against the cold, wet, heat, danger.

At the same time the people fill the area with significance. A roof over one's head therefore provides physical protection and also becomes a reflection of the approach to life of its inhabitants.

A natural roof over one's head is a cave. In Lower Austria the Gudenus Cave is used as a shelter as early as the Palaeolithic Age 70,000 years ago. It is frequented repeatedly over many thousands of years.

As an alternative to living in a cave, people build stable and durable dwellings on open ground.

In tents or huts people sit around a fire pit, making tools from flint and the bones and horns of hunted animals. Unfortunately we know nothing about the dwellings of the Mesolithic Age from 8,000 B.C. But the large quantity of flint tools at their settlement areas is an indication that they stayed for long periods.

In the Neolithic Age from around 5,500 B.C. the first farmers in Central Europe live in large longhouses. They are masterpieces in their dimensions and design at the start of sedentism. Together with the first domestic animals and agriculture, these solid wooden houses indicate a further acquisition of living space.

TEXT 16

Survival: Hunting / gathering

Around 35,000 years ago the anatomically modern human lives in the ice-free regions of Central Europe. The natural environment in the Upper Palaeolithic Period is shaped by the last ice age, the Würm glacial stage. The high-lying mountain regions in Europe, Eurasia, America and the polar caps are covered with thick ice sheets.

The anatomically modern human, *Homo sapiens*, lives in Central Europe.

Over a period of several millennia he replaces the Neanderthal. To date it has not been explained how this

happened and whether there was contact between the two.

People find food by hunting and gathering in the grassy steppes between the icy mountain ranges. They follow the migrating herds of animals, such as reindeer, which are linked to the seasons. Other important hunted animals are the horse and the mammoth; but actually every available animal is hunted and utilised.

The barren Ice Age landscape offers few edible plants. The diet is supplemented by collecting juniper berries, various grasses and tubers. A dynamic and flexible lifestyle is required in order to survive.

The tools of modern humans become more varied than those of the Neanderthals. Using percussion technique they make many different types of stone equipment. From flint cores they chip off countless blades and turn them into combined tools.



MAMUZ
SCHLOSS ASPARN/ZAYA

