12: Late Bronze Age Kuckenburg: settlement, burial ground, fortification and/or place of sacrifice?

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Involved disciplines: Archaeology, Isotopes analysis, Archaeogenetics, Archaebotanic, Archaezoology

Number of positions requested: 2

Abstract:

Kuckenburg near Esperstedt (Saxony-Anhalt) is a hilltop site, about 10 km east of Querfurt, near the river Weida, and has been known as an important site of prehistoric settlement since the early 20th century. In 2005, the Department of Prehistoric Archeology of the FSU and the State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology Saxony-Anhalt started a small research project on the settlement. This research attested the use of the area since the Late Palaeolithic / Mesolithic, during the Neolithic periods of the Baalberge and the Salzmünde culture, and again during the Late Bronze Age and the early Middle Ages.

The main exploitation phases of the hilltop site can be seen in the late Bronze Age and the early Middle Ages. The project will focus on the settlement chamber of Kuckenburg during the late Bronze Age (phase Ha B). During this time, the area included an open settlement on the opposite bank of the Weida, a regular burial ground with intact remains, and the Kuckenburg itself which, in addition to settlement pits, shows evidence of fortification and a series of irregular burials that hint clearly at the cultic/ritual character of this site. It is important to note that individuals were usually cremated during the Late Bronze Age, and therefore Kuckenburg presents a rare and unique opportunity to shed light on human health, nutrition, and demography in Central Europe during this period.

The project links scholars from FSU and the MPI SHH, as well as between two Departments (DA and DAG) within the MPI SHH. These departments have already been involved in pilot projects that carried out DNA analyses of the special burials to test for DNA preservation and feasibility of in-depth genomic research, as well as initial isotope studies on ten selected skeletons.

Within the project there are two PhD-positions. Based on the successful screening results and promising outlook of these pilots, one of these positions will be devoted to the continuation of the DNA and isotopic studies in order to include all 42 individuals, and their associated faunal remains. The goal is to fully explore the genomic signatures, biological kinship, and patterns of individual diet and mobility with the overarching aim to reconstruct life histories and bioarchaeological profiles of all members of the three Late Bronze Age areas in the settlement chamber.

The second position will be devoted to archaeobotany and thus to the development of flora and fauna in the settlement Chamber Kuckenburg from the Late Palaeolithic to the early Middle Ages. Most notably, this site contains occupation layers that represent the transition from Pleistocene hunter/gatherers to early Neolithic farmers. This was one of the most significant cultural and demographic shifts in European prehistory and we cannot understand how this shift occurred without archaeobotanical studies.

This research project involves a multi-disciplinary research team and is looking for students from a variety of backgrounds including, but not restricted to, **molecular biology, bioinformatics, microbiology, chemistry, biochemistry, mathematics, physics, computer science, anthropology and archaeology.** Students holding a Master's degree with a proven record of success in their discipline and a genuine interest in examining questions related to human history are encouraged to apply.