

12. Summary

The hilltop site of Thunau am Kamp, situated at the eastern edge of the Waldviertel, is unique in the region of Lower Austria with regard to its extensive archaeological investigation. On the Schanzberg a fortified central settlement, a centre of power, existed in Early Medieval times. At the central part of the Schanzberg, the Obere Holzweise, there was a burial ground consisting of 215 burials. It is by far the largest uncovered burial ground of Carolingian times in Lower Austria north of the Danube. On the Obere Holzweise there has also been unearthed a multi-phase 'manor farm', which consisted of settlement structures and palisade-systems, the latter around a major part of the graves. A large part of the facilities on the Schanzberg were enclosed by a multiphase fortification wall.

The burial ground was investigated archaeologically in the years 1986, 1987, 1990 and 1993. It extends from the northeast to the southwest. Many of the graves are positioned in irregular rows, while some of the graves are grouped. In some areas they are arranged densely; mainly to the south there were found only scattered burials.

A grave-free strip runs through the burial ground. It is interpreted as a pathway which divides it into NW and SE areas. A grave-free space in the NW area might reflect the location of a wooden church. The characteristics of the surrounding graves encourage this assumption.

All the burials are inhumations in flat graves. Most of them were only shallow at the time of their recovery. More than half the burials feature stone settings of different extents; stone packing occurs exceptionally. Only three graves yielded hints of wooden frame constructions, but indications of wooden bases or coffins are present, the latter indicated by the position of the bones. The majority of graves are oriented NW (W) – SE (E). Exceptionally the deceased were interred turned by about 90° or 180°.

In two cases no bones at all were found in the grave pits. The numerous disturbances of the graves were, among other reasons, caused by succeeding burials in the same or

in a new grave pit and by ploughing. They can be connected to grave robbing in only very few cases. Multiple graves are extensively discussed. They can be subdivided into contemporaneous burials as well as subsequent burials and additive graves.

Apart from a few exceptions the graves are primary burials; the dead were interred in an extended position on their backs. In one case the deceased was laid down in a crouched position. This can be connected to injuries which were apparent on the bone material. In two cases the legs of the deceased were slightly bent.

Two burials are secondary burials; the bones of the dead had been stacked, in one case in a slight depression. In the other case the finding of stacked (long) bones in a rectangular pit, as well as the objects found within the grave (components of a lock) point to an interment in a wooden box.

In a small number of burials the arms were orientated towards the pelvis. Their distribution within the burial fields is significant; religious faith might have been expressed with this arm position, among others by socially high-ranking persons.

Due to the posture of one deceased a former wrapping of the body seems likely.

Some burials do not correspond to the standard burial customs; the deviations concern positioning and treatment of the dead as well as the sepulchral structure. These burials are crouched inhumations, secondary burials, possible symbolic graves (cenotaphs), graves with stone packing and burials with a distinctively deviant orientation. Deviant burials with similar characteristics were laid down close to each other. Their predominant position at the periphery of the burial ground might be associated with their relatively late dating, which makes it impossible to judge to which extent this was an expression of a separate position in society.

In about a third of the graves furnishing was preserved. Twenty-two graves yielded lock-rings, and in five of them

there existed presumably originally two pairs. The earliest datable types are those with sheet-metal spheres and ball assembly and big silver chain earrings. The earrings with four sheet-metal spheres are made of silver, partly gilded and decorated with granulation and filigree. Grape-pendant earrings are present with an unilateral grape and s-loop as well as with a decorated lower hoop. Earrings with one or three sheet-metal spheres, earrings with s-formed endings, with a pendant consisting of a cylindrically wound wire or a roulette of sheet metal are types which occur generally in the Danube and eastern Alpine areas. Late types are earrings with opposite wire winding and a tetragonal profile of the hoop.

Rings are present in the form of plate and band finger rings. The first ones can be divided into those with slender and those with broad plates. For these types the social relations seen in graves in the area of present-day Lower Austria have been compiled. In one case a sheet of metal is riveted onto the ring.

A singular fibula has been found; the rectangular example is gilded and decorated with points and studs. A group of similar objects is known from the eastern edge of the Carolingian Empire.

Beads have been noticed in five graves, all of which contained burials of children. In one case the chain also contained glass pompoms as buttons and a snail shell. There are segmented beads, singular beads of different form, for example polyhedral, pearls with an inner bronze-sleeve and mosaic eye beads.

Regarding dress accessories, a pin decorated with a sheet metal bead and discoidal decorations as fastenings are present. One of the latter is the only object in the grave field which is made of gold (foil). Gombiky (bead/buttons) were preserved in the grave of a child, as well that of a female and a male juvenile. The examples are made of glass, of bronze with a wire decoration, of undecorated sheet metal or of silver with granulation in triangular form.

Small bells were present in five graves, the majority of which contained Infans I burials. The specimens made of iron display a perforated extension of triangular shape. The bronze specimens are of oval shape as they have been cast and display a slightly conical upper section and a notched decorative strip.

Concerning belt components some buckles (in graves of male individuals, mainly of mature age) and two strap-ends can be listed. A buckle, coming from grave 129, is profiled and stands in the Carolingian tradition. A strap-end has been constructed in several parts and consists of massive tinned bronze; there is no parallel known. A rectangular strap-end with lead-tin coating and an ornamental field

has been identified as a simplified imitation of Carolingian products.

Of precious metal objects one golden object, one object/pair made of gilded silver, five of gilded non-ferrous metal and nine of silver were found. The latter come mainly from Infans I burials. Objects with a lead-tin-coating, imitating silver, were found in the three best-equipped male graves.

Four of the male burials contained weapons. This is slightly more than a tenth of all male burials. In two graves of adult mature men swords (of type Y) were laid down. The pommels are bipartite and the blades were more or less certainly decorated with pattern-welded panels.

The ¹⁴C dating of these two burials is important for the assessment of the start of production of Y-swords and pommels. They can obviously be assigned as present already in the 9th century. A singular axe has been found in the grave of a juvenile. It is of miniature size and its prolonged neck points to the nomadic milieu. In four graves spurs with rivet plates were present, in some cases accompanied by parts of associated fastening sets. Their pikes are partly prolonged and slightly thickened. One pair was produced in miniature size and found with the burial of an Infans II.

The limited number of weapons and spurs is an argument against the equation of such burials with individuals involved in battle and rather indicates the expression of social status resp. its perception. A single arrowhead, with a rhombic sheet and spout may have been a *pars pro toto* offering or the buried had been hit by this arrow.

About 13 % of the burials, mainly those of men and children, contained knives. In three of them also ribbonlike sheath mounts were found. In one case a clasp knife can be reconstructed. A knife with a heart-shaped handle was probably attached to the belt with small iron rings and may have served as a chirurgic instrument due to its shape and hardness (see E. Nau and M. Mehofer, this volume).

A few finds of gravers with bone handles, a possible fragment of a chisel and two touchstones (see M. Ježek) are to be connected with the processing of wood and metal. A spindle whorl, awls, needles and loom weights point to textile production and the processing of textile and leather. In some graves fire steels and slicers were present.

In four graves animal bones were found at the same level as the burial and can probably be interpreted as residues of food offerings. In four graves metal components of buckets – iron bands, attachments and handles – occurred.

Ceramic vessels were found at 13 burials, mainly of Infans I. The pots were most frequently deposited in the area around the feet of the deceased. Only one pot can be described as graphite pottery. Also in the burial grounds

of the Great Moravian centres little if any ceramics occur, whereas in the early medieval burial grounds of Lower Austria these offerings are much more frequent.

A fossil oyster and the tusk of a boar might have had an amulet function.

As well as the types of finds occurring generally in the Danube and East Alpine regions, and the Moravian and Carolingian components, Eastern as well as late Avar and Byzantine influence can be discerned to a small degree.

Various articles shed light on different categories of the material culture and allow for further investigations. The contribution by K. Grömers and E. Nowotny deals with the textile residues, their microstratigraphic relations to metal objects and to each other. A wide range of different and also patterned fabrics was determined. They are mainly remains of garments. G. Ruß-Popas deals with leather residues, their characteristics and primary function. E. Nau and M. Mehofer investigate two swords and a small iron knife with a heart-shaped grasp concerning their raw material, production techniques and usability. M. Mehofer analysed the chemical composition of selected objects of non-ferrous metal alloys, silver and gold. Together with the tinning of some objects in order to imitate a silver surface this allows some conclusions about the metal supply to be drawn. M. Jezek examined stone artefacts for traces of non-ferrous metal and interprets them concerning the function of these objects as touchstones. The filling of an iron mounted bucket was analysed by S. Uzunoglu-Obenaus regarding macro-botanical material.

The division of burial activity into phases and the reconstruction of the course of burial activity have been undertaken on the basis of horizontal and vertical stratigraphy, existing typo-chronological models, associations of types of finds in graves of the burial ground of Thunau, ¹⁴C dates and horizontal stratigraphical observations concerning burial customs. Subsequently these results are brought into synthesis with the sequence of palisade systems of the 'manor farm'.

Regarding vertical stratigraphy the few superpositions of graves, as well as the stratigraphical relationship of the graves with settlement objects and the palisade systems are discussed. Concerning the latter the documentation barely allows definite assertions.

The mapping of types of finds has little significance, as most of the find types rarely occur.

Furthermore the burial ground did not spread systematically. Combination statistics and other devices of seriation cannot be applied in this respect for different reasons. Therefore it is necessary to draw on typo-chronological models and existing insights into the relative chronology of the present find types.

For ten burials on the Obere Holzweise ¹⁴C dates are provided. These cover relatively broad time spans and can be divided into an older (appr. 770–880 AD) and a younger (appr. 890–990 AD) group (fig. 102).

On the basis of a combined calibration one can assume, that the burials in the sword graves 129 and 130 have been laid down in the 9th century. The sequence of the burial ground (fig. 114) arranges the singular calibrations chronologically; the result is contrary to the relative chronological sequence of the graves due to archaeological criteria. The same applies to the sequence of the different burial places on and around the Schanzberg of Thunau (fig. 115).

The earliest graves can be dated to the 2nd half of the 8th century; they contain objects of the so-called Vor-Köttlach horizon. Chronologically these are followed by burials, which yield dress accessories that seem most likely to belong to the older Great Moravian horizon and subsequently the younger Great Moravian horizon.

In all probability the outstandingly furnished graves of three men (grave 129, 130 and 76) can be dated towards the end of the 9th century. By bringing in the ¹⁴C dates and stratigraphical information, about a ninth of the graves can be dated more or less exactly and reliably (fig. 135). Possible hints to the end of occupancy of the burial ground are drawn from the lack of late Carolingian-Ottonic dress accessories and those of early Árpád times. Only a few objects are reminiscent of the material culture of the Hungarians. Uncertainties concerning the material culture of Moravia in the 10th century impede assessment.

Horizontal stratigraphic observations regarding burial customs (orientation, different kinds of food offerings etc.) contribute to recognising the course of burial activity; they are not *a priori* interpreted as chronologically determined, but are also examined in regard to other factors – especially a social component and the gender/age of the deceased.

The earliest burials are identifiable at two spots in the northwest-area. Contemporaneous settlement features, at least in those excavation areas which have been reviewed so far, are missing. The first settlement phases on the Obere Holzweise are dated between the first half and the middle of the 9th century by Hajnalka Herold. Succeeding these phases she reconstructs three phases of the 'manor farm', which consist of settlement features and palisade systems. From the first half of the 9th century onwards the dead were also interred in the southeast-area, still inside the first palisade system (fig. 136). As the 'manor farm' was built and in the succeeding phases of building modification, burial activity continues. In those grave groups which contain the earliest identified graves, interment goes on at least until the late 9th century. From this time onwards burials are also laid down outside of the newly-built second palisade

system as well as mainly in the northwestern parts of the burial ground (fig. 137). Here – as well as at the southern edge of the burial ground – a last burial phase or phases can be noted (fig. 138).

About 11 % of the burials may have been laid down in post-Great Moravian times. The question remains open of whether the burial ground was still in use around the middle of the 10th century, by the time the settlement features of the so-called phase of subsequent use after Herold do not respect the pathway running through the burial area anymore.

Special attention is paid to the social identities and relations of the buried displayed in burial. Their influence on burial customs including those of grave goods is examined, as this helps among other factors to find out about the chronological relevance of these phenomena. Firstly age and gender are investigated. These aspects show for example any correlations with the effort undertaken regarding grave construction. Furthermore different aspects of furnishing (presence, extent, value and find categories) are examined. These aspects are partly dependent on the age of the buried. In this connection the emphasis on male individuals of matured age and females of young age should be stressed, which is discussed concerning age-specific gender roles.

In a further step the author aims to approach the display of social structure in and through the burial ground. Therefore grave furnishing, the sepulchral structure and the positions of the graves are taken into account. The presence of an elite can be assumed due to the characteristics of the central settlement on the Schanzberg, that identify political power and a high standard of living. In this context the identification of the elite as well as possible status symbols are discussed. The furnishing with weapons is firmly bound to high social status. When it comes to male burials an outstanding social position seems to be expressed by a combination of rich furnishing and a substantial effort regarding grave construction. This does however not apply to female burials. Generally an aspiration for representation becomes clear, which was probably encouraged by luxuriant burials in the close Moravian centres. Yet the furnishing of the elite burials on the Obere Holzweise is less comprehensive and distinctly of lesser quality, when partly lead-tin coating imitates precious metal, though the furnishing corresponds to the usual model applied at the edge of the Carolingian Empire. A regional imprint finds expression in the equipment of female burials, which matches the geographical position of the Schanzberg between the two spheres of power of the enlarged Carolingian Empire and the (Great) Moravian Empire.

The earliest richly-furnished female burials contain gilded material, in the case of silver objects of Carolingian

character, those of the second phase furthermore silver jewellery typical of Great Moravia. Gilded objects occur only in the grave group around burials 129 and 130; and the same applies to Carolingian objects and their imitations. Silver objects however seem not to have been restricted to the highest-ranking *familia* so as to have been affordable only for their members. The use of precious metal above all in the earlier phases of the burial ground is striking. This might be a result of the virtual absence of richly-furnished female burials in the late phases.

The positioning of the graves is on one hand influenced by the sequence of burial activity, and on the other becomes relevant regarding the overall assessment of the burial site concerning social status. It is striking that the group of graves around grave 129 and 130 is situated just east of the possible former location of a wooden church.

On the burial ground high-status families as well as persons of families of lower and middle status were buried. As those fore-mentioned might have been members of the household of high-ranking families it is not surprising to find them buried in the same location. Due to certain indications the path running through the area was interpreted as separation of the cemetery into two burial areas, probably one of socially-higher and one of lower-positioned families.

From the late 8th to the late 9th century, as well as around 900 AD, the elite of the hilltop site, which was likely the matter of a *familia*, was buried in a separate group of graves in the NW area. While here in the early period rich furnishing is to be found within female graves, it occurs in the later phases within male graves, among them the burials of two sword-bearers, of which the one in grave 129 had been beheaded. There are different possible reasons for this late display of the male elite in burial. The same applies to the absence of late rich female burials, and the associated decline of precious metal in the graves. The positioning of the hands at the pelvis, which is above all prevalent in the prestigious grave group, is possibly linked to Christian belief. The graves of this group, as well as further graves situated close to the grave-free area in the NW area are remarkably homogeneously orientated. This supports the idea that a wooden church existed at this place; this was possibly already the case in the first half of the 9th century.

In the last phase a strengthening of paganism seems to be showing, as deviant burials and food offerings accumulate in the northwestern periphery of the burial site. This might be connected to the weakening of churchly power in the early 10th century. The occurrence of deviant burials in the SE area already in the course of the 9th century and the fact that ceramic offerings appear mainly in this zone might be connected to superstition and less strict burial

norms. Burials from the first half of the 10th century can be perceived only by a few burial objects, merely with rough dating possibilities, as well as by the reconstructed sequence of the burials. This development seems to have been connected with a changed economic and political situation, as may be expected in consequence of the decline of Great Moravia. At that time the settlement activities are likely to have shifted to the valley settlement of Thunau.

Other burials which are located beside the cemetery but on the Oberen Holzweise are temporarily interpreted as individuals being probably persons of low and lowest social status and/or being buried after the regular use of the cemetery.

Due to the historical situation – Thunau is situated between the two spheres of power of the enlarged Carolingian Empire and the (Great) Moravian Empire, while in the northwest there was the region of the Bohemian ‘tribes’ – the political affiliation of extended parts of Lower Austria north of the Danube is unclear, which provokes interesting questions for archaeology. Therefore the position of the burial ground and the whole site of Thunau in its larger surroundings are discussed. This

comprises references to trade, found on the Schanzberg, and possible regional routes, archaeological and written evidence of the immediate surroundings, and a compilation of graves of the Carolingian Age in Lower Austria north of the Danube, as well as of central sites in closer and wider settings.

The elite who lived in the centres in the east of the Carolingian empire were buried in so-called prestigious burial sites. One of these is the burial site at the Obere Holzweise due to its characteristics and its affiliation to the centre at the Schanzberg. The best parallels concerning grave equipment and the structure of the hilltop site are to be found in the Great Moravian Empire, which might to an unknown extent be influenced by the lesser state of research in the Carolingian Danube area. The manifestation of a Moravian and – to a smaller amount – Carolingian component corresponds with the geopolitical position of the hilltop site. It seems to have been in certain times more under northern, and from time to time more under southern political and cultural influence. In this regard future insight gained by processing the finds and findings within further parts of Thunau will be of interest.

