

FARMING AND FORAGING ON LIMESTONE AND LOESS – ARCHAEOBOTANICAL RECORDS FROM THE LATE IRON AGE SETTLEMENT OF MICHELSTETTEN (LOWER AUSTRIA)

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Macrofossil analyses of the samples from six pit houses from the La Tène settlement of Michelstetten yielded a total of 1526 charred plant remains and 74 identified taxa (17 cultivated and 57 wild plant taxa). Cereals were mainly represented by broomcorn millet (*Panicum miliaceum*) and barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), while einkorn (*Triticum monococcum*), spelt (*T. spelta*), emmer (*T. dicoccum*) and naked wheat (*T. aestivum/durum/turgidum*) were found in relatively low numbers. Foxtail millet (*Setaria italica*) was rare, and records of rye (*Secale cereale*) and “new type” glume wheat were restricted to single specimens. Pulses were represented by pea (*Pisum sativum*) and lentil (*Lens culinaris*), while oil seeds were – most probably due to taphonomical reasons – completely absent. Charred remains of food residues were recorded in the pit houses with the richest plant material, consisting mostly of amorphous crusts with cereal bran remains. The entire spectrum of cultivated plants fits well with plant assemblages from other Iron Age sites in eastern Austria (Oberleiserberg, Roseldorf, Gars-Thunau) and matches the general pattern of eastern central Europe during the Iron Age.

Among the wild plants, ruderal plants and arable weeds were clearly dominant, followed by species of steppe- and forest-steppe-like habitats. Forest species however were much rarer, and wetland species played an insignificant role. Some of the recorded weeds (e.g. *Buglossoides arvensis*, *Asperula arvensis*) indicate that the Iron Age settlers had to make use of stony, marginal soils in addition to the rich loess sites in the settlement’s vicinity – a possible hint of a relatively dense human population. Of particular interest is the find of *Xanthium strumarium*, as it comes from a purely ruderal context: so far, most prehistoric records of this species had been associated with natural riverine habitats. It seems that the ruderal career of *Xanthium* has begun at quite an early date. Judging from the abundance of dry land species in Michelstetten, open habitats must have played an important role in the Iron Age landscape. Recorded species range from typical steppe representatives like *Stipa pennata* to forest steppe- and shrubland-species, like *Nepeta nuda* and *Veronica teucrium*, which points to a rich and varied mosaic of open and semi-open habitats. This matches the archaeozoological record of ample livestock keeping in the settlement.

Woodland species are mostly represented by taxa growing on forest edges and in open woodland tracts, e.g. hazel (*Corylus avellana*), cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*), bladder cherry (*Physalis alkekengi*), elder (*Sambucus nigra*) or apple/pear (*Malus/Pyrus*). These fruit-bearing, edible taxa might rather reflect wild plant collecting activities than vegetation patterns. Aside from the fruits, other wild plants recorded in Michelstetten might have been collected, either for consumption or medicinal purposes. When compared with other Iron Age sites of the region, the wild plant spectrum of Michelstetten mirrors subtle differences in local climate, which can still be observed today.

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