

The Funnel Beaker culture in northwestern Germany - reconstructions from palynological investigations

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Introduction

Northwestern Germany was settled by the Funnel Beaker people (western group) and the succeeding Single Grave culture. Several megalithic tombs, grave mounds, and signs of former settlements show the presence of these cultures in the area between ~4000 and 2500 yr BC. Despite these prominent monuments (Figure 1), only little is known about the temporal and spatial patterns of the Neolithic occupation period, and the level of influence these cultures had on the surrounding landscapes. In the present study, archaeological excavations and pollen and macroremain analyses at four exemplary sites shall shed light upon these issues.



Figure 1: Megalithic tomb Wildeshäuser Geest, photo: D. Nösler

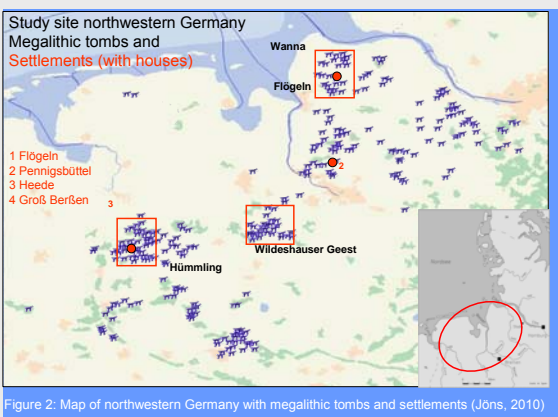


Figure 2: Map of northwestern Germany with megalithic tombs and settlements (Jöns, 2010)

The selected study sites (Figure 2) are located in the federal state of Lower Saxony and represent sandy islands that were formed due to the fragmentation of Pleistocene sands (Geest) by enhanced bog growth during the Atlantic and Subboreal period.

Detailed information from the Neolithic occupation in the Elbe/Weser area was obtained by Behre and Kučan from the Siedlungskammer Flögel. (Figure 3). It needs to be investigated how these findings could be related to the whole sphere of the Funnel Beaker Culture (western group).

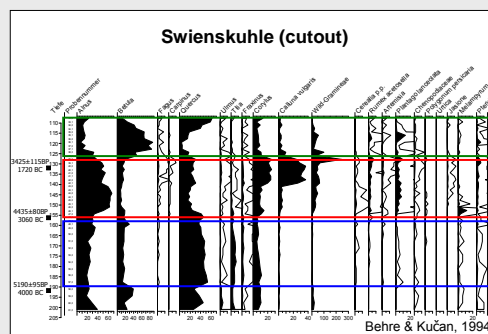


Figure 3: Pollen diagram from the Siedlungskammer Flögel (Swinskühle) Coloured boxes indicate different phases of the Neolithic occupation: Blue box: Leaf fodder period with some agriculture after ~4000 BC, Red box: Landnam period (Iversen, 1941) with wood pasture and agriculture after ~3100 BC, Green box: Reforestation with birch and oak

The first project phase is designed to find adequate archives for palynological investigations in the vicinity to archaeological finds. The numerous bogs and fens in the area serve as archives. Due to heavy peat-cutting and intense agriculture their suitability is limited and some effort has to be done in the reconnaissance of sample sites.

Preliminary results

Around 30 sites were sampled at the four localities so far. From the Hümming (Figure 4) and the Wildeshäuser Geest (Figure 5) one promising profile each was recovered to investigate the Neolithic environment and human impact on the landscape in the area.

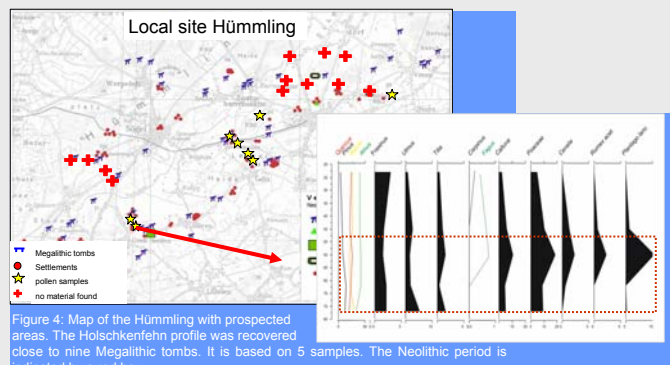


Figure 4: Map of the Hümming with prospected areas. The Holschkenfehn profile was recovered close to nine Megalithic tombs. It is based on 5 samples. The Neolithic period is indicated by a red box.

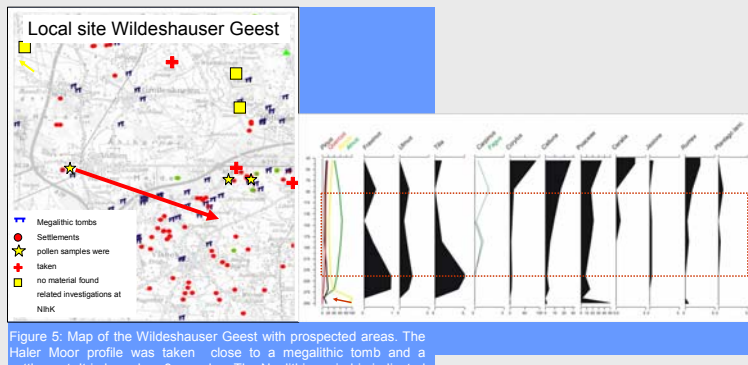


Figure 5: Map of the Wildeshäuser Geest with prospected areas. The Haler Moor profile was taken close to a megalithic tomb and a settlement. It is based on 9 samples. The Neolithic period is indicated by a red box.



Figure 6: Fireplace with Neolithic axe nearby Flögel. Photo: D. Nösler

Trial trenches nearby Flögel (Figure 6) revealed a Funnel Beaker settlement. Just northwest to the excavation site the Dorumer Moor (Figure 7) provides material for a detailed palynological investigation which was shown by Dörfler (1984). Detailed probing of peat thickness will help us to find an adequate sampling site for further analyses.

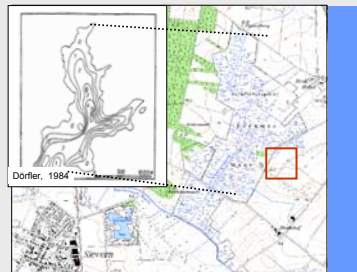


Figure 7: Topographic map (TK 25, LBEG 2009) of bog Dorumer Moor, peat thicknesses on the left map in meters. Red box indicates the excavation site.

Outlook

Detailed analysis of the recovered profiles

High resolution AMS ¹⁴C-datings to establish the chronology of settlement patterns

Finding suitable archives for detailed pollen analyses at Wanna

Recovering a Neolithic profile from the Dorumer Moor nearby Flögel

Macroremain studies from settlement excavations