Germany's Oldest Cemetery: DFG funds joint project led by the University of Göttingen

The hill “Weinberg” near Groß Fredenwalde is the site of an archaeological sensation: 8,500 years ago, Mesolithic people created a burial site on the hill. The universities of Göttingen and Kiel, and the Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft Berlin, are exploring the site, together with the Landesarchäologie Brandenburg. The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) is supporting the two-year research project at the University of Göttingen with a total of around 250,000 euros.

The first graves were discovered as early as 1962 during construction work on the hill, but the tremendous importance of the site only became clear during post-excavations just a few years ago. A team led by Professor Thomas Terberger from the Department of Prehistory and Early History at the University of Göttingen uncovered, among other things, the tomb of a young man who had been buried in an upright position with offerings such as bone tips and flint knives. The researchers also found the grave of an infant whose body had been ritually strewn with red ochre when laid to rest – the oldest grave on the hill to date. "So far, only a few individual graves or small groups of graves of mobile hunter-gatherers from the Mesolithic period have been found in Central Europe," says Terberger. "The burial ground in Groß Fredenwalde was apparently deliberately laid out by a community and used for centuries."

The skeletal remains on the burial ground are so well preserved that they can be examined with scientific methods. The majority of the graves belong to the time around 6,000 B.C.; one dates back to around 5,000 B.C., when the first farmers of the Linearband pottery colonised Uckermark. The cemetery therefore offers the opportunity to study the late hunter-gatherers before and after the beginning of the "Neolithic Revolution" in Northern Germany and to examine environmental changes through pollen analyses. Genetic analyses, supported by the Max Planck Institute for Human History in Jena, will clarify whether there had already been breeding between indigenous people and these first farmers during this period.

Note to editors: the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) is the central, independent organisation for research funding in Germany.
The profile of the grave pit of the grave documented in 2014 on the Weinberg leaves no doubt: the young man was originally buried in an upright position, but only the leg bones are still approxima
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3.) It was only in the laboratory of the HTW Berlin that the grave of a small child was uncovered. The body had been ritually strewn with red ochre when laid to rest.

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